PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 273

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1995–96

COMPRISING PERIOD
4 March—14 March 1996

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4 March 1996

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 273**

SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1995–96

House of Commons

Monday 4 March 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

1. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many charities have now been awarded funds from the national lottery. [16350]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The National Lottery Charities Board has made 2,460 awards, worth £159 million, to charities and voluntary organisations. In all, lottery distributors have made 4,394 awards, totalling £556 million to charities and voluntary organisations. That accounts for more than 85 per cent. of all awards made to date.

Mr. Jenkin: I thank my right hon. Friend for that staggering reply and draw her attention to the fact that the national lottery has meant a bonanza for my constituents, with more than £1.2 million spent in my constituency and the immediate surrounding region—and that achieved without any substantial fall in charitable giving for any significant charity. May I congratulate her on that excellent result?

Mrs. Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend and congratulate his constituents. He has a formidable list of charities being supported by the national lottery. They include Homestart and church and sports projects. With other hon. Members, he is benefiting from the great national lottery. Contrary to expectations, the evidence is that contributions for charitable giving have not fallen.

Mr. Maclennan: To put this in perspective, what has been the Government's tax take in the period for which the right hon. Lady gave those figures? What study are the Government undertaking of the lottery's impact on people whom the charities board is most concerned about: the poor?

Mrs. Bottomley: I will write to the hon. Gentleman with figures on the tax take. Of course the Treasury would benefit from other ways in which the public spent their money if the national lottery did not exist.

As to the effect on charities, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of some of the surveys of what has happened. A recent survey showed that, although 2 per cent. of people thought that they would give less, 4 per cent. thought that they would give more. Gallup found that 5 per cent. said that they would give more. The UK charities lottery and many of the people moving into scratchcards have benefited. The medical charities finally reported that, contrary to expectations, despite the lottery, they had had an extremely successful year. The Home Office is formally monitoring the position and that information will be available in due course.

Mr. Jessel: To put this in true perspective, is not the national lottery a brilliant national achievement that has given tremendous pleasure to millions of participants and has raised enormous sums for charities and other good causes? Is it not a fact that charities such as the British Heart Foundation and Cancer Appeal have increased their uptake since the national lottery started?

Mrs. Bottomley: Yes.

Dr. John Cunningham: It is tempting to accept the right hon. Lady's suggestion that, under the national

lottery, everyone is a winner, but the story beneath the headline numbers that she has given is not quite that good. More than 80 per cent. of all lottery funding has gone to voluntary organisations, but 40 of those awards total almost £1 billion. Traditional street collecting, fund-raising charities—the tin shakers and ticket sellers—have been most badly affected, as figures from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations graphically demonstrate. Sadly, many small and medium local and regional charities are adversely affected by the national lottery's impact and its huge success in gathering money. We need to consider much more carefully and closely those effects, especially on small revenue-raising charities.

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Gentleman is correct to say that we need to consider keeping all aspects of the lottery under careful review. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced—as he said that he would do during the Committee stage of the Bill that introduced the lottery—that the Department is monitoring not only giving, but how much charities are receiving.

Charitable giving has fashions and although tin collections are not having an easy time, those organisations moving into scratchcards seem to be doing very much better. The British Legion, recently the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and the United Kingdom Charities Lottery have all recorded considerable increases in the amounts being made available. A particular charity says that it is losing contributions and that turns out to be a reduction in legacies—it is hard to understand how it could be thought that the national lottery is responsible for that.

Seaside Piers

2. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total sum contributed by the national lottery to seaside piers; and if she will make a statement. [16352]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The national lottery has contributed £790,042 towards two projects aimed at assisting seaside piers.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I applaud the generosity of the national lottery in giving funds to what appear to be modest and unambitious pier projects. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the unique features of Southend pier, which is the longest pier in the world—more than 1 mile long—and which has a wonderful train running its length? It has survived three fires and vessels crashing into it. Given that great record, will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that, if Southend council applies for help further to improve that wonderful pier, careful consideration will be given to that application?

Mrs. Bottomley: The piers of the realm need careful protection and I am delighted that the national lottery benefits them. My hon. Friend will be aware that I do not have direct control over the lottery distributors—more is the pity, I sometimes think. However, I shall do all that I can to encourage the chairmen of the distributing bodies to give piers every favourable consideration.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am all in favour of lottery money going to seaside piers, but I hope that no lottery money will go to hereditary peers. Will the right hon. Lady make it quite clear that no lottery money will go towards funding a royal yacht, just in case it crashes into Southend pier?

Mrs. Bottomley: No such application has been made. However, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that a number of hereditary peers are chairmen of some of the distributing bodies that make the decisions on how lottery money is allocated.

National Stadium (Manchester)

3. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received about the siting of a national stadium in Manchester for the Commonwealth games in 2002. [16353]

11. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had with the Sports Council about the siting of a major national stadium in Manchester. [16361]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I have received a number of representations about both Manchester's plans for the Commonwealth games stadium and the city's bid to develop the new national stadium using lottery money. I have followed the debate closely, although it has always been an important principle of the national lottery that distribution of the proceeds should be independent from the Government.

Mr. Evans: Is my hon. Friend aware that there will be a phenomenal number of visitors to the north-west when the games are held in Manchester in 2002? I am sure that he wants the games to be a success. However, to have a world-class games, Manchester will need a world-class stadium. Will he give the House a commitment today that the athletes, the phenomenal number of visitors and the people of the north-west will not be let down in 2002 by the facilities on offer during the Commonwealth games?

Mr. Sproat: I am sure that visitors and athletes will not be let down. I am aware that my hon. Friend has taken the lead in looking after the interests of the north-west in this matter. The Sports Council is looking at the project for the national stadium, which may or may not be the stadium for the Commonwealth games. If it is not—it is a big if because the Sports Council has not made up its mind between Manchester and Wembley—I am sure that any other stadium will be absolutely fitting for the Commonwealth games.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Will my hon. Friend confirm that Manchester city council is working hard to improve the chances of the Manchester bid being successful by attending to the traffic and public transport implications? Is he aware that those of us who represent constituencies in the nine other boroughs of the county of Greater Manchester would like to be confident on that point?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, Manchester city council is looking very carefully at two transport matters—car parking and

the metro and rail facilities for the games. I know that both are being kept under very close consideration and my Department is keeping in touch.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Can the Minister, from that Dispatch Box, assure the House that, whichever of the two cities succeeds in its bid, not one penny of lottery money will go into the pockets of private shareholders? Were that to happen, would that not be a gross misuse of such money?

Mr. Sproat: Any distribution of lottery funds is a matter for the appropriate distributing body.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that such a stadium would be important not only to Manchester but to Lancashire and the entire north-west? Will he do everything possible to ensure the necessary transport links in Lancashire so that we will be able to make full use of the facilities that will be provided for 2002?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I will certainly do everything appropriate for my Department, and I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks about transport in general to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

National Lottery

4. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many good causes have been awarded funds from the national lottery in south-west England. [16354]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the south-west of England, 377 national lottery awards totalling £52,681,000 have been awarded. City Screen Ltd., the Riding for the Disabled Association and the Devon branch of the British Red Cross have received awards and are three examples of 10 awards that amount to more than £1 million in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Sir John Hannam: I congratulate my hon. Friend on, and thank her for, the wide range of awards to my constituency and to the south-west. However, will she accept that the tremendous success of the national lottery has created its own problem because many organisations face increasing difficulties in raising matching funds for the grants that they have been given? Will she therefore consider relaxing the rules of matching funds to ensure that many such projects reach completion in future?

Mrs. Bottomley: All the distributing bodies have flexibility in the extent of partnership funding for which they ask. The Sports Council, for instance, recently announced a number of initiatives for which it wants only 10 per cent. funding. The caring charities do not ask for partnership funding at all. In spite of the cries of concern, the evidence to date has been that matched funding is increasing. Overall, for every £1 of lottery money, £1.49 has been produced in partnership funding. Figures for the latest three months suggest that for every £1 of lottery money, £1.61 has been raised in partnership funding. In other words, lottery partnership money is improving in the same way as business sponsorship of the arts last year increased by one fifth on the previous year.

Mr. Barnes: Is it not demeaning for hon. Members to have to get up in National Heritage questions to try to get funds for their constituencies or to be informed by the Minister how much money has gone to their areas? Why do we not have proper Question Times such as those that we used to have on energy and on employment, which address serious matters rather than who happens to get what for his area in the log roll?

Mrs. Bottomley: I think that hon. Members know that it is not within my power or gift to distribute lottery money. They also celebrate the fact that many arts, sports and heritage projects are able to receive funding on an unprecedented basis. That is a source of great pleasure and a great achievement for all those who are benefiting throughout the country through more than 5,000 different awards.

Millennium Projects (Wales)

5. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the projects in Wales which will be considered by the Millennium Commission before the end of March. [16355]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Millennium Commission has considered applications for funding for the Welsh national stadium in Cardiff and the Middleton botanic garden. The Millennium Commission awarded grants of £46 million and £43 million respectively to those projects. The commission does not expect to consider any further applications until April.

Mr. Griffiths: Is it not true that, after the Cardiff opera house fiasco, the Millennium Commission never had any other intention but to award the national stadium to Cardiff? Consequently, the Bridgend proposal was strung along to the extent that, on the day that the announcement was made, Jennifer Page, the chief executive of the Millennium Commission, wrote to the Bridgend consortium saying that its proposal was insufficiently developed and, without the backing of the Welsh Rugby Union, would not succeed, while a Millennium Commission projects officer wrote on the same day to say that Bridgend's project was under initial consideration and that all projects would be reviewed by the end of April.

Will the Secretary of State commission an inquiry into why Bridgend was deliberately misled by the Millennium Commission? Will she release a copy of the report given to the Millennium Commission and a transcript of the proceedings, which I believe were fixed? The Bridgend proposal was never going to be considered by the commission.

Mrs. Bottomley: If the hon. Gentleman had had his way, there would not have been a lottery in the first place. Along with 41 Opposition Members, he voted against the national lottery. If he had had his way, there would be no national stadium in Cardiff and no botanic gardens. Some 23 per cent. of the Millennium Commission's money has gone to Wales, but not a penny of it would have gone to Wales if Opposition Members had had their way. The Millennium Commission looks carefully at each application. The decisions are never easy; I can say only that the commission takes great care and great trouble. I believe that the stadium in Cardiff will be a magnificent place to accommodate the 1999 Rugby world cup.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend suggest to the Millennium Commission that, when it considers

projects in Wales, it should consider that some in Wales want not to celebrate, but to destroy our national heritage by making Britain a republic?

Mrs. Bottomley: I entirely agree. As Secretary of State for National Heritage, I believe strongly in protecting the institutions of this country. Those who flirt with republicanism are likely to get the result achieved by the Labour party in Australia.

Mr. Fisher: What is the Secretary of State's policy towards millennium fund projects in Wales and elsewhere whose grants lead directly to an increase in the profits and capital assets of the private sector companies that happen to own the sites in question? How will she ensure that the public benefit from, and share, the huge profits and increase in land values that British Gas is likely to gain if the millennium exhibition goes to its site in Greenwich? What lessons are there more generally—

Madam Speaker: Order. The question relates entirely to Wales. If the hon. Gentleman relates his supplementary question to Wales, it is acceptable; otherwise it is not. The question is specifically about one area of the country.

Mr. Fisher: I was asking what lessons there were for millennium projects in Wales from the actions that the Secretary of State intends to take in Greenwich.

Mrs. Bottomley: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's question; it is an important matter which needs clarification. On all occasions, the Millennium Commission seeks to get value for grants. If the Millennium Commission had such a project in Wales, it would ask somebody of the calibre and ability of Sir Peter Levene to ensure that any grant that it invested in a project delivered the best possible return for the people.

National Lottery

6. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many good causes have been awarded funds from the national lottery in the west midlands. [16356]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Three hundred and thirty-one national lottery awards totalling £53,426,000 have been awarded in the west midlands.

Mr. Coombs: In contrast to the carping of Opposition Members, may I reassure my right hon. Friend that the national lottery is extremely popular in my constituency? Is she aware that the national lottery has meant that £25,000 has gone to Age Concern to fund anew its minibus for people in the area and that we are getting no less than £1 million for a regional sports centre between Kidderminster and Stourport? Will my right hon. Friend consider, through national lottery funds, funding for a permanent home for the Bewdley festival, which has become such a success in my area over the past decade?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am delighted to hear about the great contribution that the national lottery makes in my hon. Friend's constituency. His Age Concern project is one of 40 Age Concern projects that have received almost £2 million so far from the national lottery. There have been well over 840 awards for the arts—more will be announced tomorrow—throughout the country and particularly the west midlands. I shall pass on to the chairman of the Arts Council and its lottery board my hon. Friend's concern for his particular project.

Mr. Olner: The Minister will realise that Nuneaton rugby football club in my constituency will not be happy with her answer, as the club had a perfectly good bid turned down for no transparent reason. Is she aware that no lottery money has come to my constituency? Does she agree that a transparent answer should be given to organisations that have been refused bids? Does she further agree that people in the west midlands require a transparent answer as to why the millennium exhibition will be in Greenwich, despite the fact that the midlands' bid was better?

Mrs. Bottomley: The national lottery has been distributing grants for less than a year, but 176 awards amounting to more than £13 million have been made to football in that time. I very much hope that the club to which the hon. Gentleman referred will be one of the lucky ones in the year ahead.

Mr. Fabricant: While I understand the concern of the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) about the Millennium Commission not putting the exhibition in Birmingham, was not the British Tourist Authority—which promotes this country's tourism overseas—right to say that Greenwich was the only possible location for the exhibition, which will receive international recognition? Does my right hon. Friend deplore, as I do, the claim that jobs will be lost in south-east Staffordshire, of all places, because the exhibition will not be held at the national exhibition centre?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am confident that the millennium festival in Greenwich will be a tremendous success, providing a national and international focus and an opportunity to gather together the nation to look forward to the next millennium. I appreciate the disappointment expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and others about the Birmingham bid. There will, however, be good news tomorrow for the west midlands, which will receive a further 13 arts awards amounting to more than £3.5 million.

"Informing the Debate"

7. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the closing date for responses to the consultation document, "Informing the Debate". [16357]

Mr. Sproat: The Government's discussion with interested parties is now effectively complete. We shall shortly announce our proposals, which Parliament will then be able to debate fully.

Mrs. Clwyd: Following the Government's humiliating defeat—yet again—in the House of Lords on the issue of listed sporting events, will the Minister assure the House today that mainstream television channels will be granted full access to those events in the future?

Mr. Sproat: The Government are strongly and sympathetically aware of the concerns expressed by

Members on both sides of both Houses. If the hon. Lady follows the proceedings in the other place tomorrow, she will no doubt get an answer to her question.

Mr. Whittingdale: In considering responses, will my hon. Friend the Minister pay particular attention to the views of the governing bodies of the sports concerned? Does he accept that the market created following the advent of Sky has resulted in millions of pounds going to sports that those sports would otherwise not have received?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is quite right. A sport such as cricket, for example, receives about 40 or 50 per cent. of its funding from television rights. In respect of the question from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley, it is interesting that the Sports Council—totally uninfluenced by the Government—has greatly developed its views from those expressed in its letter of 16 January to those in its letter of 22 February, which I hope hon. Members will have a chance to see. That letter places strong weight behind my hon. Friend's point.

Five Nations Championship

8. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations she has had with the rugby football unions of the five nations in the five nations championship concerning its inclusion in the schedule of listed events. [16358]

Mr. Sproat: Representatives from the English and Welsh rugby football unions were among those who participated in a meeting with my officials last month to discuss issues raised in my Department's discussion paper on broadcast sports rights. The meeting covered a range of general issues, including the contents of the list of protected events.

Mr. Morgan: Despite Wales having lost yet again on Saturday and despite me becoming for the past 48 hours the first in-patient that the Samaritans have ever had, does the Minister agree that this matter is important for the long-term future of the game of rugby football, and for inspiring young people to take up the game and for helping pensioners who may not have Sky—some of whom may be old enough to remember Wales winning a rugby match—to watch the game? Was not the list of eight events that left out the five nations championship drawn up defectively? Should it not be put right at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Sproat: I thought that Wales, although they were beaten yesterday, put on a terrific show and I hope that they will smack the French in the next match.

The hon. Gentleman knows that not all the home unions want the Five Nations to be a listed event. However, the Government are considering that event and the question of listed events is kept under review. No doubt, the House will have the opportunity to discuss the matter during proceedings on the forthcoming Broadcasting Bill, when it comes to this place.

Mr. Waller: Has my hon. Friend had any discussions with the Rugby Football League about the inclusion of rugby league events in the schedule? Does he agree that the trick must be to try to ensure that rugby league receives proper remuneration for sports rights, while, at the same time, the maximum number of viewers have access to the important games?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend gets the balance right. I think that some 26 out of the 32 professional rugby league clubs were, or are, insolvent and in desperate need of the money that comes from television sports rights. At the same time, we want the maximum coverage on television so that people who cannot get to games can be inspired by, and enthused about, the sport.

Sport

9. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on her Department's role in promoting greater public involvement in sport. [16359]

Mr. Sproat: My Department fully recognises the general benefits of sport and recreation, and aims to improve opportunities for both champions and the general public. That is why we issued the sports policy paper last summer, which outlines our proposals to improve sporting opportunities, starting with young people in schools. We are also involved in promoting the benefits of sport in "The Health of the Nation" initiative.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend spell out the Government's policy on the selling off of school playing fields? Is he aware that Essex county council is trying to sell off a playing field that currently serves Hadleigh junior and infants schools in my constituency? Does he agree that those fields should be retained for the children's use and that communities in that area should be protected from further house building?

Mr. Sproat: On my hon. Friend's specific question about Hadleigh junior school, I believe that today is the last day on which representations on the appeal to allow what he wants can be made to the Department of Education and Employment. Then it is up to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. On his general point, we want school playing fields to be protected and we are consulting about whether the Sports Council should become a statutory consultee in all future sales of school playing fields.

Mr. Pendry: Does the Minister agree, in spite of last week's helpful announcement by the Sports Council of a national junior sports programme, and while recognising, as did his department's document "Sport: Raising the Game", that there is no substitute for introducing sport to the wider public through sport in schools, that local authorities have a vital role to play, too? If he does agree, why have 75 per cent. of local authorities been forced to reduce expenditure on sport and recreation over the past year, why has the sportsmatch scheme been cut by 15 per cent., and why has the Sports Council's budget been reduced by £2.3 million? Is he aware that these cuts must be viewed against the background of a decline in the number of PE teachers from 42,000 to 24,000 and of the selling off since the Conservatives came to power of over 5,000 playing fields? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that if he wishes to promote greater public involvement in sport,

he should do it not merely by throwing lottery money at the problem—robbing Peter to pay Paul—but by putting in place a well-structured sports policy. When are we going to get it?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman has got it. It was called "Sport: Raising the Game" and it came out on 14 July last year. That document clearly states that an extra £1 million will be put towards training teachers, £1 million from Sportsmatch will go to schools and another £2 million will be put forward to be bid for so that schools and clubs can improve their links, one with another. On playing fields, we are consulting about whether the Sports Council should become a statutory consultee. In addition, there is PPG note 17 and the 1981 regulations that stop schools selling off sports grounds where there is not a certain ratio of pupils to hectares.

National Lottery

10. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many good causes have been awarded funds from the national lottery in south-east England. [16360]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Four hundred and eighty-two national lottery awards, totalling £116 million, have been awarded in south-east England.

Mrs. Lait: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the residents of Hastings and Rye are already seeing the benefits of some of the awards to my constituency, many of which are extending the tourism season? Is she also aware that people in Hastings enjoy gambling on the lottery? Does she agree that, if we are to extend the tourism season, high-quality casino gambling would be very acceptable? Would she please make representations to the Home Office to that effect and to ensure that no money from the national lottery goes to new build casinos?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right. Lottery money is promoting the tourism industry particularly in coastal areas and the English tourist board has submitted a bid to the Millennium Commission further to promote our coastal areas. She will be aware that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is consulting on casinos and bingo, which also have an important contribution to make to the tourism industry. I shall certainly bear in mind my hon. Friend's comments.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: As someone who takes her holidays in a seaside resort, the Secretary of State is no doubt aware of the importance to the local economy and national built heritage of some of our local seaside towns. As there have been capital controls on local authorities that have prevented them from investing in many of our national seaside heritage buildings, resulting in dilapidation and decay, would she be prepared to undertake a national review of seaside resorts and, in particular, of how investment in them can be facilitated?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am well aware of the work undertaken by the English tourist board to promote our coastal towns. As far as I am concerned, we need a booming tourism industry. The greatest threat to that industry is that the Opposition should reach power and introduce the social chapter and the minimum wage. That would, at a stroke, do more damage to our tourism industry than anything else.

Personal Privacy (Media Intrusion)

12. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to introduce legislation to protect personal privacy from media intrusion. [16362]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no present plans to do so.

Lady Olga Maitland: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the deep concern of many people that personal privacy is being persistently abused by the media? I refer in particular to the unauthorised use of material from overheard telephone calls, notably on mobile phones, which is published in the press. I also refer to snooping photographs, which are taken of people in their homes and without their consent. Will my right hon. Friend consider legislation in that regard? It would be a great tragedy if we allowed technology to abuse and kill our freedoms.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend speaks for many in the House when she describes her profound concern about intrusions into privacy. She will be aware that interception of private calls can be a criminal offence—it is a matter for the police to investigate. The Press Complaints Commission has warned newspapers that the publication of any material achieved as a result of an intercepted call might be a breach of clause 5 of the code.

"Competing With the Best"

13. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made towards implementing the proposals in "Competing with the Best". [16363]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have made excellent progress towards achieving the two main objectives of "Competing with the Best"—improved quality and more effective marketing. We are continuing the drive to increase competitiveness by undertaking a major investigation into how well the industry uses and invests in its most important resource—its people.

Mr. Coombs: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to study the speech made last week by the chairman of Bass about the remarkable competitive advantage of this country in the matter of non-wage labour costs as compared with countries such as France, Italy and Spain? Given that the Spanish have just thrown out their labour party after far too long in power, would this be the right moment for this country to consider introducing socialist measures such as the national minimum wage and the social chapter, at a time, when other countries may well be considering how damaging to their tourism industries such measures are?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Sir Ian Prosser identified the non-wage costs, which go

from 10 per cent. in the United Kingdom to 43 per cent. in Italy. He said in his speech last week that Europe and the European Union are at a crossroads, and asked:

"Is it going to be a deregulated, business friendly, high growth region—or . . . a tradition-led, inward-looking region concentrating on attaining long-term political objectives without regard for the short-term consequences for business or employment?"

The Government are quite clear about the answer—deregulation and low labour costs are the way to more employment and greater wealth for Britain.

National Lottery

15. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the number of unsuccessful lottery bids. [16366]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the 12 months from 1 January to 31 December 1995, almost 7,000 applications were received by the four arts councils, the four sports councils, the national heritage memorial fund and the Millennium Commission. Of those, fewer than 1,000 have so far been turned down—a rejection rate of 14 per cent. In the same period, the National Lottery Charities Board received more than 15,000 applications, of which around 13,000 were rejected.

Mr. Pike: Has there been any attempt to advise those whose applications were rejected as to why they failed? Are there any examples of applications from deprived areas that were unable to meet the matching requirements that are necessary to get a grant from the lottery board?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am anxious that, as we make progress with the national lottery, there should be greater assistance to those who have difficulty processing their applications and those whose first applications were unsuccessful. All the distributing bodies are trying to set in hand precisely such schemes. All the distributing bodies have flexibility over the partnership requirements for which they ask. The Sports Council for example, provides up to 90 per cent. funding for projects in areas of high need.

World Cycling Championship

16. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the progress being made by the British Cycling Federation in its organisation of the world cycling championship in Manchester; and what assessment she has made of the value for money provided by the grant given by the Sports Council. [16367]

Mr. Sproat: The British Cycling Federation has assembled an experienced organising committee to prepare for the championships and has provided appropriate assurances that satisfactory arrangements are in place. It is for the Sports Council to consider the value for money provided by its grants to governing bodies.

Miss Hoey: I thank the Minister for that response. Does he share my concern that some of the arrangements for the world cycling championships to be held in Manchester at the end of August have not gone very well? Does he agree that it is particularly important that everything possible is done to make the world championships a successful event? Has any further decision been made on televising them—there have been difficulties—and will he take a personal interest in ensuring that they are promoted successfully so that they bring success to our cyclists and show that Britain can organise and compete in an event in Manchester?

Mr. Sproat: I agree with everything that the hon. Lady says. It is certainly true that the championships were bedevilled by difficulties between the British Cycling Federation and Sport for Television and by the structure of the velodrome. I hope that those difficulties are now completely settled. I also agree that it is important for us to show that we can run world championships in Britain. We have seven world championships this year and we aim to make them world class indeed.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is good for British sport that we have two world beating cyclists in Chris Boardman and Graeme Obree? Does he further agree that the development of new facilities, such as the velodrome in Manchester, is extremely important to the promotion of Britain in world sporting events?

Mr. Sproat: I very much agree with the last part of my hon. Friend's question. One of the prime objectives of the new UK Sports Commission is to attract the greatest number of world-class sporting events to Britain. I share my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for Mr. Chris Boardman and, as proof of what I say, we have invited him to be part of the new English Sports Council, and he has accepted.

National Lottery

17. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many orchestras in the east midlands have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [16368]

Mr. Sproat: There have, as yet, been no awards to orchestras in the east midlands. However, there have been 38 awards to arts projects in the region, totalling some £8 million. Of those, seven awards have been made to bands and one to a choir.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend will realise that Leicestershire is the centre of English rugger, with the Leicester Tigers being the main side in the county. Will he help me make it the centre of English music-making by increasing the publicity his Department gives to applying for an award under the national lottery scheme? I am sure that many orchestras—not least the Wigston orchestra in my constituency—would be very pleased to know the details of how to make such an application so that they may benefit as a result.

Mr. Sproat: As to my hon. and learned Friend's reference to Leicester and rugby, a son of Leicester—Dean Richards—made the single greatest contribution to England's Calcutta cup victory on Saturday. As to giving more publicity to how to make lottery applications, my right hon. Friend recently authorised the distribution

of a leaflet on the subject. If my hon. and learned Friend has any difficulties in that regard, I would be glad to answer any questions.

18. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much revenue the national lottery has generated for good causes. [16369]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Revenue generated by the national lottery for the five good causes totals £1.613 billion.

Mr. Greenway: That news is very welcome. My constituents are particularly delighted that the Greenford lawn tennis club has received £51,000 from the national lottery to open a new and much needed pavilion, which will be used by everyone in the area. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the pavilion will prove so good and useful that it is fit to be opened by the Prince of Wales, the Princess of Wales or the Queen—if Labour Members would leave them alone?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend speaks for many hon. Members in welcoming the contribution of national lottery awards to their constituencies. It is bringing communities together, promoting sport, encouraging arts activities and restoring heritage and many rural areas. It is a magnificent success.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Record Office

26. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representation he has received about the rules governing the date of release of documents from the Public Record Office. [16441]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Jonathan Evans): Neither the Lord Chancellor nor I have received any recent representations either about the 30-year closure period for public records provided for by the Public Records Act 1958, or about the criteria for closure for longer than 30 years.

Mr. Banks: I shall make a representation now. The Government continue to bang on about freedom of information, but there are records relating, for example, to the force-feeding of suffragettes or the abdication crisis and the Nazi past of Edward VIII that we are not allowed to know anything about. Is not it right that we should be told what has occurred in this country's history? All of those records should be freely available now and in the public domain.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman might be interested to know that the 30-year period rule was established in 1967 by the then Labour Government and that the 30-year standard closure period—

Mr. Banks: The suffragettes were more than 30 years ago.

Mr. Evans: Does the hon. Gentleman want to listen to the answer? The 30-year closure period is standard in most European Union countries. Notwithstanding that fact, in 1992-93, the Government decided to undertake a policy review in the area. After receiving representations, we came to the conclusion that 30 years was appropriate in those cases which the advisory council on public records—chaired by the Master of the Rolls—considers should be subject to the closure.

Mr. Lidington: Does my hon. Friend agree that much more must be done to improve access to the public records by people who cannot make the difficult journey to the Public Record Office at Kew? Will he, therefore, encourage the keeper in her work of ensuring that finding aids, indices and some of the records are available through on-line databases and other forms of new technology?

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his observations. I share his concern about ensuring that public records are maintained and made available to the public. We are dealing with a substantial number of records, which is one of the reasons why the move to Kew was undertaken. His points about indices and matters of that nature are well taken.

Mental Incapacity Report

27. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consideration underlay his Department's decision to organise a consultation exercise on its response to the Law Commission's report on mental incapacity. [16442]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In considering the Law Commission's report on mental incapacity, the Government recognise that that is an important and sensitive subject which raises moral and ethical issues about which many people have strong personal views. Therefore, the Government believe that it would be inappropriate to make any proposals to Parliament in the absence of there being full public consultation.

Mr. Khabra: Will the Parliamentary Secretary confirm that competent patients' advance refusals of treatment for their medical conditions are legally binding on doctors by virtue of case law?

Mr. Evans: I do not intend to be drawn into giving at the Dispatch Box answers about hypothetical legal situations. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman has some of those strong personal views to which I referred. He is keen to see voluntary euthanasia made acceptable, but the Government fully support the conclusion of the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics that euthanasia is unacceptable. Further, the Law Commission's report on the subject made no proposals for the legalisation of euthanasia.

Family Law Bill

28. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what further representations he has received in relation to the Family Law Bill. [16443]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have received a number of further representations in relation to the Government's divorce reform proposals.

Lady Olga Maitland: In the light of the overwhelming vote in the House of Lords last week, will my hon. Friend

consider reviewing the fair and just division of pension assets for divorced women? Does not he accept that the subject is causing great concern because it is unfair that women who have devoted their lives to bringing up children should be beggared in later life because they have not been able to take full advantage of the family assets?

Mr. Evans: I note my hon. Friend's observations about pension splitting and, of course, the Government will give close attention to the views that were expressed in the other place. My noble Friend Lord Mackay made it clear in that debate that there were a number of practical difficulties in the proposals. Those practical difficulties were not removed by the vote that took place.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for clarifying which vote she meant, because there was another vote on Thursday that supported, by two to one, the Government's proposals for removing fault from divorce.

Ms Lynne: Will the Minister make a commitment today that the vote on splitting pension rights on divorce will not be reversed on the Floor of this House?

Mr. Evans: I said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) that there are a number of practical difficulties in the proposition that has been made. I do not think that I could have been clearer. It is appropriate for the Government to consider the views that were expressed in the other place and that is what the Government will do.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is not the assertion that the Family Law Bill would make divorce easier a total misunderstanding? Is not the situation that anybody can get a quickie divorce today, on demand, by making allegations of fault and causing bitterness which, most importantly, distresses the children? The Bill would not allow quickie divorces and everyone would have to wait a year, during which the matter could be reconsidered, and there would be no obligation to make any allegation of fault that would cause bitterness between the parties and the children.

Mr. Evans: My hon. and learned Friend is right about the proposals in the Bill. A wide range of concerns have been expressed about the arrangements to which he refers. I should like to mention some of the observations that have been made by those who have the greatest practical experience of couples who are, sadly, involved in marital breakdown. For example, the chairman of the national trustees of Relate, the former Marriage Guidance Council, said on 23 February:

"The Family Law Bill is the best piece of social legislation for the last 20 years".

Mr. Boateng: Does the Parliamentary Secretary recognise and accept that women and children are all too often the financial victims of divorce and the domestic victims of violence? Does he also accept that there is no majority in the House for a Bill that does not address effectively both those concerns? Will he indicate clearly and categorically from the Dispatch Box this afternoon that the Government support pension splitting in principle and that they support—in principle—giving more powers to the police to deal effectively with domestic violence?

Does the Parliamentary Secretary understand that, unless he is able to give those assurances, he will not find a majority in the House for his Bill? It is time that the Government started putting families and their protection first.

Mr. Evans: Of course I accept that the interests of the parties—the wife and the children—are of great importance. That is why certain measures have been introduced by the Government.

The hon. Gentleman knows that, during the divorce process, there is an obligation on the legal practitioners acting for the parties to take whatever the pension fund may be into account. I recognise that that was not considered sufficient. Pensions earmarking was, therefore, incorporated in the Pensions Act 1995.

Mr. Boateng: Not enough.

Mr. Evans: I have spelt out some of the practical consequences of pension splitting, but I have also made it clear that the Government will take account of the vote in the other place.

The hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that the Law Commission's recommendation that there should be additional power in the hands of the police should be made a part of the Bill that is now in another place. That matter was considered by the Select Committee on Home Affairs and by the Special Standing Committee that considered the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill last year. Those Committees concluded that the recommendation should not be included in legislation.

Magistrates

29. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps are being taken to differentiate between active and passive support for a political party when considering an applicant for the magistrates' bench and assessing the balance of appointments to any particular bench. [16444]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. The political views of applicants are taken into account to achieve a balance on the bench, but it is not considered necessary to distinguish between active and passive support for a political party.

Mr. Arnold: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to know that the majority of applicants to the bench tend to be Conservative voters. As a result of the Government's obsession with political balance and the fact that the overwhelming number of people who come forward vote Conservative, Conservative-voting applicants have been turned down while there has been a scramble for applicants for the bench who vote Labour, perhaps councillors or other activists. Given that, in my constituency, there is one example of a highly inappropriate appointment, could we perhaps differentiate between those who passively vote for a party and those who are activists? We would not then overlook many good applicants and end up with a few unsuitable ones.

Mr. Evans: The only distinction that it would be relevant to raise in relation to active and passive support is in those cases where it may in some sense affect the

impartiality, as it were, of the bench. It is important that those who are appointed have a clear understanding of the rule of law, are people of good character and command local confidence. I am not surprised, therefore, that there is a significant number of Conservative applicants. Political views are taken into account only to maintain balance on the bench. As the House knows, the Lord Chancellor's Department is engaged in an advertising campaign, using the local press, television and radio, in areas where it is concerned that there might not be a balance, to encourage applicants with the qualities that I have outlined to come forward.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that most of my colleagues would be astonished to find more Labour applicants and more Labour justices of the peace than Tories in the areas that we represent? In Bolsover, throughout the 26 years that I have been a Member, there have always been more Conservative than Labour supporters on the bench. That is true of many other areas. There is only one solution: it is high time that we elected magistrates. We could try elections for judges as well, and retire them at 65.

Mr. Evans: This seems to be one of those times when several Labour Members come through with Labour's secondary agenda. We shall have to wait to see whether the hon. Gentleman's proposals are adopted by his Front Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). A survey at the end of 1995 revealed that, of all appointments made in that year, fewer than 40 per cent. of those appointed to the bench were supporters of the Conservative party.

Legal Aid

30. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made on the reform of the legal aid scheme. [16445]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor published a Green Paper setting out proposals for the reform of legal aid in May 1995. Approximately 200 responses have been received. The Lord Chancellor has been examining the responses and intends to make an announcement on the future of the legal aid system before the summer.

Dr. Spink: When considering reform of the legal aid system, will my hon. Friend seek to improve or increase protection for my constituents and, indeed, for the taxpayer, from the people who occasionally use the legal aid system improperly, and particularly from vexatious litigants?

Mr. Evans: I am very much aware, from responses to the Green Paper received by the Lord Chancellor's Department, of concerns about whether those who are granted legal aid are advantaged in relation to costs. That, in essence, is one of the points my hon. Friend has raised, and I have had correspondence with him about it. He will be interested to know that that concern was also raised by a number of people who responded to the consultation, and it may well be one of the areas that is addressed in the response.

Mr. Llwyd: As the availability of legal aid has decreased, from about 80 per cent. when it was first introduced to just under 30 per cent., may I suggest one immediate saving that could be put in train—an appointment system in magistrates courts? Rather than have 10 or 12 legal aid lawyers wasting time all morning, give them an appointment system such as they have in the civil courts.

Mr. Evans: That is an interesting idea and it might be taken up by the magistrates courts themselves. The hon. Gentleman will know that magistrates courts committees are independent.

Eligibility is somewhat higher than the hon. Gentleman said. He is right to say that it has diminished, but the overall legal aid budget has grown inexorably. That is why the reform announced by my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is so very important.

The Monarchy

3.30 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of the controversy, especially over the weekend, about the monarchy, may I ask you, Madam Speaker, whether anything in our Standing Orders prevents the House from debating the future of the monarchy, and whether any Minister has approached you with a view to ensuring that such a debate takes place in the near future?

Madam Speaker: Nothing prevents the House from debating the monarchy. It is for the Leader of the House and the Government to make time for such a debate. At the present time, I have not heard that we are to have a statement or a debate on that matter.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Given the confusion that exists as a result of the comments of a senior spokesman on the Opposition Benches, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), I wonder whether he or the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has come forward to request time to make a personal statement about the confusion about Labour party policy on this matter.

Madam Speaker: No. What happens outside the House is not my concern, thank goodness.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: There can be no further points of order on that.

Mr. Corbyn: In view of the comment that you have just made about a debate on the future of the monarchy, can I take it that you would accept an application for a private Member's debate on the relationship of the monarchy just as much as a motion from the Leader of the House? In other words, could any hon. Member propose such a motion to discuss the future of the monarchy in this country?

Madam Speaker: There are no private Members' motions days left, so I could not accept such an application—I was quite correct in my answer to the hon. Member for Bolsover.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A number of Labour Members who are very concerned about this and clearly oppose the monarchy are demanding a debate. I feel that you may want to give in to the request for a debate, so that we can sort out exactly what is happening in the Labour party. The country wants to know. Officially, the Labour party is in favour of the monarchy, but clearly some Labour Members are against it.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the Speaker of the House does not determine the time that is given to debates. It is for the Government to do that, or for the Opposition on their Supply days. We have heard all the exchanges across the Floor of the House on this matter. We shall now proceed with the debate on the economy.

The Economy

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.34 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move,

That this House congratulates the Government on the fundamental health of the British economy, as demonstrated by nearly four years of sustainable growth, the best inflation performance for almost 50 years, Government borrowing coming down, 29 months of falling unemployment and an increase of over half a million people in jobs since the recovery began, and recognises that this is a result of the Government's economic policies which are making the United Kingdom the enterprise centre of Europe.

We are discussing the British economy, which currently enjoys the most favourable circumstances that any hon. Member present can remember. We are debating, in Government time, the most attractive economic prospects that have obtained for a generation. Let me begin by setting out a few facts—facts on which any sensible debate must be based.

We in this country have enjoyed sustained economic growth for nearly four years. All the conditions are in place to ensure that that healthy growth is maintained. This year, the level of growth in the United Kingdom will be among the best—perhaps the best—in the G7 economies. Exports have performed strongly, thanks to improved competitiveness; unemployment has fallen every month for the past 29 months, bringing registered unemployment down by more than 750,000. The number of people in jobs has been boosted by half a million since the recovery began.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: In a second. First, let me finish giving the background, for my hon. Friend's benefit.

We are enjoying the longest period of low inflation for nearly 50 years. We are on course to meet the Government's inflation target. According to the Bank of England's latest inflation report:

"Underlying inflation in the United Kingdom is more likely than not to be somewhat below 2½ per cent. in two years' time."

Public sector borrowing is on a firm downward path, and we are on track to balance the budget over the medium term.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that those essential facts will assist my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) to make his helpful intervention.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the great improvement in the British economy that has taken place under the present Government—which all Conservative Members acknowledge—dates back very nearly to 16 September 1992, when we abandoned the idea of fixed exchange rates? Why, in an interview that took place a few days ago, did he express sympathy for the concept of a single currency, although tens of millions of voters in this country and throughout

[Mr. Cash]

Europe are deeply opposed to it? Its manifestations so far have generated the prospect of the worst unemployment rate in Europe for 40 years.

Mr. Clarke: As my hon. Friend knows very well, I believe that our recovery dates from before our exit from the exchange rate mechanism. The circumstances that I am describing, however, are due to the Government's policies on taxation, public spending, inflation and deregulation over the past three or four years. Those are clear policies on which all members of the Conservative party are agreed.

As for the article that my hon. Friend mentioned, I was trying to give an interview about the economy to a journalist with whom I am otherwise friendly, but whom I have always considered to be obsessed with the single currency. I was just waiting to see whether I could give an interview that remained free of the subject. The experiment proved unsuccessful.

Today's debate, however, is about the economy. If my hon. Friend studies what I actually said—the parts of the interview that are in quotation marks—I think that he will find it to be an impeccable explanation of why our long-term interest rates were higher than those of France and Germany for many years. Those rates were dependent on our history of inflation and devaluation. Now we are putting that behind us, and establishing a track record that will stand the country in good stead. Whether or not we join the single currency—if and when it ever happens—the British economy will be safe in our hands.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Before the Chancellor leaves the subject of the interview, will he tell us whether he is sympathetic to his predecessor's view that a single currency would inevitably lead to a single European Government?

Mr. Clarke: No, I am not.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: If I may return to the subject of the British economy—

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I thank the Chancellor for giving way: I see that another of his hon. Friends, the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith), wishes to intervene on the European issue.

Does the Chancellor still believe that those who support the idea of a referendum on a single European currency are—as he told "Newsnight" two years ago—"slightly up the creek"? Does he support those who favour such a referendum, or not? Yes or no?

Mr. Clarke: I cannot really complain about the hon. Gentleman wanting to turn to the issue of Europe. I can only say that, whenever we mention the British economy—even when I last faced him, in Aberdeen—it is the last thing on earth he wants to talk about, and he welcomes any opportunity to change the subject. As for quotations, I prefer to see what I have said in full and in context. I tend to find that partial quotation—even by my hon. Friends, let alone by my opponents—of what I sometimes say on these subjects is extremely misleading. I should like to get back to the subject we are debating.

Mr. Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: With respect—

Mr. Brown: With respect, the Chancellor has changed the subject and refused to answer the question. I should be very happy to quote in full what he said on "Newsnight" on that day, but will he answer the question whether he supports a referendum on the single currency—yes or no?

Mr. Clarke: The Prime Minister has made it extremely clear that, if and when we ever face the choice of whether to join a single currency, a referendum is one of the things that could be considered at the time. That has been my view. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is my view—I have repeated it very frequently. A referendum on the single currency has nothing to do with a debate on the British economy.

I will therefore, with your permission, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Gordon Brown *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: No; really, my own Back Benchers do it better. I have indulged the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend.

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot have two hon. Members on their feet—*[Interruption.]* I presume that the Chancellor is giving way?

Mr. Clarke: No, Madam Speaker—I was deferring to you.

Madam Speaker: I am simply telling the House that I cannot have two hon. Members speaking at the same time.

Mr. Clarke: To get back to the point, let me remind hon. Members from both sides of the House of last year's Budget, which contains a summation of what I have just described. I was able to reduce taxes by £3 billion in total, leaving the British people with more of what they earn and save. I kept the total of public spending under firm control to pay for those tax cuts, but I was still able to spend more on the public services that people care about: the health service, education and the police service.

That combination of tax cuts, cuts in public spending to pay for them and increased resources for the national health service, schools and the police service is a combination that only good government can deliver.

The experience of this recovery demonstrates the British economy's potential.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Chancellor recall that, on David Frost's programme, in September 1994, he said that he would not favour an income tax cut if borrowing was in excess of £30 billion? With borrowing now forecast to be in excess of £30 billion, does he think that he was right to cut taxes?

Mr. Clarke: I am always delighted to find that my words are followed with such close and rapt attention.

My forecast for the public sector borrowing requirement in the Red Book, as it happens, was £29 billion. Partial quotation is no good. My policy for three years—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) can quote my Budget if he wishes to know what the Government's economic policy is.

My policy for three years has been to get public borrowing under control and to move towards balance in the medium term. The Red Book in front of the hon. Member for Gordon clearly shows that we are on course to achieve that. Of course we had to spend to finance the tax cuts I made this year, and we did so—which is why the Labour party had no opinion on the subject at all. The hon. Gentlemen voted for tax increases in the face of all that, but, as far as I am aware, in order to spend the revenue raised by those tax increases rather than to cut borrowing.

The combination of those policies has also put us on course to achieve what I believe is the sole object of economic policy: increased prosperity, falling unemployment and the prospect of creating a healthy enterprise economy.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall in a moment.

We are enhancing the British economy's potential. The Government's liberalising, free-market reforms in the past 16 years have transformed the British economy into a flexible success story. I have a quotation to support that. Last year's OECD survey of the United Kingdom said that our

"sweeping structural reforms . . . are yielding dividends in a more flexible, competitive and less inflation prone economy."

That is what the Government have put into place, and that is what we are debating today.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman also agree with the OECD that Britain has slipped from 13th to 18th place in the world prosperity league?

Will he now answer a question on public spending that has been put to him in the past but which he has failed to answer? The Prime Minister has said that he wants to get public spending as a share of national income down to 35 per cent., but the Chancellor is quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* as saying that 40 per cent. is the maximum. Does he support the Prime Minister's figure—yes or no?

Mr. Clarke: If I am allowed time, and if there are not too many interventions, I propose to deal with all this rubbish about league tables at a suitable and later point in my speech. These bogus tables give a misleading impression of British economic performance since 1979—clean contrary to the everyday experience of people old enough to remember what things were like before 1979. That certainly deserves an answer, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to give him one later.

I have set a target—it remains the Government's target—of reducing the proportion of GDP taken by the state to below 40 per cent. In my interviews, and in those given by the Prime Minister, we have made it clear that we would like to go beyond that, if that proves possible. No one in the Government has ever set a target of 35 per cent.; we are reducing the figure to 40 per cent.

The proposition is a straightforward one: in any given year, when the totality of Government spending grows by less than the growth of the economy, the proportion taken by the state falls. No party in the United Kingdom—or even in western Europe—could succeed in this endeavour as well as we have over the past few years.

I am proud of our economic performance during the recovery, but I am also optimistic about our prospects. I am confident that the British economy will defy its detractors and have yet another good year in 1996. *[Interruption.]* I should like to outline the solid reasons behind my confidence when I assert my 3 per cent. growth forecast—which I heard someone on the Liberal Bench questioning a moment ago.

I believe that 1996 will be a good year, first, because I expect investment growth to pick up this year as firms expand their capacity. The conditions for firms to invest have rarely been better. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has been going on about his meaningless strategy for investment—never as yet explained—for the past three years. We now have the conditions that stimulate investment, however.

Inflation is low and stable, providing the environment that business needs when making long-term decisions. Company balance sheets are in good shape, with profits up by about 6 per cent. over the past year. Because we have inflation under control, I have been able to reduce interest rates to historically low levels. That is the right strategy for investment, and its effects will flow through in 1996.

Secondly, in 1996 I also expect an upturn in the growth of consumer spending. This year, increased consumer spending will be the main source of growth in the economy. I estimate—it is only an estimate—that it will be up by 3.5 per cent. on last year. Consumers will be able to pay for the extra spending. People will see the effects of the Government's policies, which are putting an extra £9 a week in the average family's pay packet, after tax and inflation.

On top of that increase in disposable income, every household has just benefited from a £54 reduction in its electricity bill as a result of the sale of the national grid. On top of that, mortgage rates are now at their lowest for 30 years. Mortgage payments for average borrowers are about £150 a month less than they were in 1990.

On top of that, many people will also benefit from another £1.3 billion of building society payouts this year, as more societies turn themselves into banks. On top of that, many people's TESSAs will be maturing—more than £20 billion in total. I believe that most of that money will be saved, but the amounts involved are enormous, and some of the money will be spent.

For these reasons, quite a lot of money will feed its way through into the domestic economy this year, some of it undoubtedly into consumer demand. These are all solid reasons for my growth forecast for 1996.

Mr. Skinner: The Chancellor has been talking about the feel-good factor and claiming credit for things that are not the responsibility of the Government. Interestingly, he has said nothing at all about tax revenues.

It has been reported that, in the run-up to the end of this financial year, there is a likely shortfall of about £9 billion compared with the Chancellor's expectations.

[Mr. Skinner]

That massive shortfall is surely due in part to the fact that some of the people who are supposedly in employment are actually in part-time work, and hence not paying the sort of tax that they would pay if they were in full-time employment.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it appears likely that there will be a shortfall compared with my forecasts in the previous Budget on tax revenues this year. I have never heard anyone putting forward the explanation for it that he has. Differing explanations exist, but that shortfall is one reason why my plans will lead to a higher public sector borrowing requirement than I forecast in November 1994. Good government, however, is to respond in policy terms to that. That is what I did in the last Budget, which showed the public borrowing requirement on a downward path.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): The Chancellor paints a rosy picture of the state of the economy, but will not a typical family still be paying more tax after next year's Budget tax cuts than in 1979? Is that not the real state of the economy?

Mr. Clarke: I paint a rosy picture—which I have not always done as Chancellor—because I give solid reasons for expecting such a picture in 1996. That is no thanks to the hon. Lady and her colleagues, who voted against most of the things that underlie it. The tax take in 1979 was artificially brought down by the Labour Government, who incurred vast sums of public borrowing.

It is true that, from 1979 to 1981, in the early years of the Conservative Government, we raised taxation as we controlled public spending to bring public borrowing back under control. It was unsustainable in 1979. When they left office, the Labour Government must have known that all that borrowing was merely tax deferred, so, under Baroness Thatcher, we raised taxation and cut public spending. The tax level is now below its level in the early 1980s. It is on the downward course again, and our party believes in a downward force on taxation.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: Perhaps in a bit.

I have given the reasons for my forecast growth of 3 per cent. The key thing is that everyone, I think—every financial commentator certainly—expects that 3 per cent. will be healthy, non-inflationary growth and good for our economy's medium and long-term future. That growth in 1996 will be the product of good government and the firm foundation for our ambition to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe.

The nature of the recovery is also interesting. In 1996, the ordinary citizen will at last begin to feel the real benefits of healthy economic recovery on his or her family finances. To produce today's good prospects, I have had to take some tough and unpopular decisions in the past three years. Sorting out public finances after a recession and keeping down inflation after a devaluation is good for business, but it can be hard in the short run on the taxpayer and the job seeker. However, in 1996, middle England will begin to realise that our promise of greater prosperity and of more jobs without a return to boom and bust is beginning to be delivered.

I believe that consumer confidence will increase in 1996, for justifiable reasons.

Mr. Grocott: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: Let me just finish 1996, and then I will give way.

Added to what I have said, I am cautiously optimistic that the housing market is beginning to show signs of life. My cautious optimism about the housing market is again based on solid evidence. Mortgage rates are at the lowest level for nearly 30 years, and house prices in relation to incomes are at their lowest level for more than a decade. Nationally, house prices are just beginning to edge up a little.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): You said that last year.

Mr. Clarke: I did not say that last year.

The Halifax house price index has risen for six months in succession. The latest figures from Nationwide, published on Friday, confirmed the tentative trend, with an increase of no less than 1.4 per cent. in the last month alone. Since last June, the number of mortgage loan approvals is up 13 per cent., and there are great bargains for first-time buyers on today's house market, so spring 1996 could be a good time for our housing market as well.

Mr. Grocott: As the gist of the Chancellor's argument is that middle England should be exceptionally happy with his management of the economy, rather than exchange insults across the Chamber, why not put it to the test? The South-East Staffordshire by-election is awaiting the movement of the writ by the Government. For nearly three months, it has not had a Member of Parliament. Let us end the words, put the argument to the voters, and find out what the people of middle England think about the Government's handling of the economy.

Mr. Clarke: From the interventions so far, it seems that some Labour Members need to be better informed before they face the electorate of South-East Staffordshire. I should not like them to mislead that electorate about where we are at the moment. However, I should like them to think of some mitigating reasons for voting against most of our measures that have produced the improvements, or even think of some policies of their own that might show how things could be done better.

Labour Members are singularly bereft in both those aspects. I have not spent my time over the past three years coming to this House and presenting a rosy picture. We have had some tough times, and all the improvements are not yet being felt by the ordinary citizen. That is inevitable, but again the Opposition will not face up to that.

A modern, flexible economy is an uncertain place for working people to earn a living for themselves and their families. No Labour Government could change the nature of the modern industrial world. The combination of modern technology and free trade causes rapid and massive changes to traditional patterns of employment.

A competitive economy must respond rapidly to those changes, but that will inevitably mean that fewer people will have jobs for life. People and businesses will increasingly favour more flexible working patterns, although that can be taken to extremes. The apocalyptic message, put about by some merchants of doom, that there are no safe jobs at all any more is plainly nonsense.

The creation of a buoyant, dynamic enterprise economy creating ever more new jobs is the only credible answer to today's insecurity. No left-wing stakeholder alternative can substitute for that; it is simply a return to old, failed left-wing nostrums. Job security in this country will be increased as this Government continue to deliver sustainable economic growth, better job prospects and rising prosperity. After 29 successive months of falling unemployment, I am glad to say that British workers are beginning to regain the sense of job security that is essential to public well-being.

People are understandably wary, but their confidence will grow as the Government continue to deliver a sound macro-economic environment, low inflation and sound public finances; as we continue to cut red tape, to cut taxes when we can afford to, and to reduce the share of national income that goes on public expenditure; and as we continue to modernise our public services and make sure that they and our welfare system are affordable—in short, as we continue to create the very best conditions for businesses and individuals to prosper by their own efforts.

I will not be satisfied with a one-year-growth wonder. That is not what the Conservative Government have been labouring for over the past few years. I would not expect the British people to be satisfied with that, either. I am determined that the British economy will continue to deliver a world-beating performance into the next decade.

I want to refer to the league tables. Labour does not look to the future; it has no views on the future beyond the next polling day. It has no economic policies that it dares to utter. It denies that it has any tax plans. It is for ever denying the spending promises of its Front-Bench spokesmen and the lobbies to which they pander. It has no inflation target as a guide to monetary policy. Labour actually hides its economic policies in shame. It tries to divert attention from the optimistic present by giving a distorted and depressing picture of the past, by blathering on about our supposed decline in international league tables during the Tory years.

I believe that today's enterprise economy is actually founded on the success of our free market policies in the 1980s, and that we are poised to resume our climb to the top of the league tables. If we go into the international comparison game, those comparisons can properly be based only on the period of the international economic cycle.

Let us look at the United Kingdom's performance over the last OECD internationally standardised cycle from 1981 to 1993. Over that cycle, the full international cycle—

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: When I finish the point; it is perfectly valid. *[Interruption.]* I shall go into hon. Members' date-picking later. I am taking the only respectable method of comparing performances—over the full international economic cycle. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is laughing nervously. It is an unusual gesture for him, but we always like to see it on the rare occasions that it evidences itself. He is laughing nervously because he knows the figures for the past full international cycle.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will in a moment. Let me give my facts first. Opposition Members who understand the matter are getting nervous about what comes next.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: No.

Not all Opposition Members understand this. In the OECD internationalised standard cycle from 1981 to 1993—a good long period—the United Kingdom ranked equal second with Germany of the G7 countries for gross domestic product per capita growth. Of the G7 countries, only Japan beat us, and since then it has seriously lost its way—temporarily, I hope. Our growth over that cycle was faster than that in Italy, the United States, France and Canada. We grew faster than the G7 and the European Union averages.

That is the picture when the sensible figures for a full international economic cycle are used. The cycle coincides with Conservative economic policies beginning to come into effect in 1981. The Labour party uses figures—*[Interruption.]* There is more nervous laughter from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. The Labour party uses figures showing us slipping in a bigger league table from 1979 from 13th to 16th. It arbitrarily adds two new countries chosen at random to put us in 18th place and to try to make us look worse.

Even in that table, all the lost places from 13th to 16th occurred between 1979 and 1980. We have not slipped in the 15 years since—even on Labour's league table. That fall between 1979 to 1980 was entirely due to the economic mess that the last Labour Government left this country as its legacy.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful for the Chancellor's fantasy, which if I can digest it properly means that he is heaping praise on his predecessor Lord Lawson for his boom and bust management of the economy in the late 1980s, which swelled certain figures.

If the right hon. and learned Gentleman looks at the reality in Britain, he will see that our car industry is owned by overseas interests, more and more of our banks are being taken over, and most of our industry is on standstill—destocking, de-investing, laying off. The image he presents is pure fantasy in the manufacturing heartland of Britain.

Mr. Clarke: My predecessors Lords Howe and Lawson were extremely successful Chancellors of the Exchequer. They took over a totally collapsed industrial economy that in 1979 was making us the laughing stock of Europe. They got hold of public finances, reduced inflation and allowed people to manage their own

[Mr. Clarke]

industry. We deregulated the labour market, and by the late 1980s we had one of the most successful economies in western Europe.

Yes, we got monetary policy wrong, but not as wrong as we would have done had we listened to the Labour party's advice. It was still urging us to cut interest rates in the late 1980s. Yes, we suffered in the recession, as did all other countries in the western world, because unsustainable public indebtedness brought us all down. Britain has recovered first from that, and stronger than our competitors, and the picture is that which I have just given.

Britain out-performed its rivals during the past full international cycle from 1981 to 1993. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) says that that is a fantasy, but he is old enough to remember the winter of discontent, the state of the British car industry in those days, our complete failure to attract investment, and the brain drain caused by high tax rates in this country. He can remember all those things, yet he seeks to deny the plain and obvious fact which is recognised by all, even those in Geneva, who look at this country.

Mr. Gordon Brown: If all that is true, why, on the same OECD figures, were we 13th in the world prosperity league in 1974 and 13th in 1979?

Mr. Clarke: Because other people were doing pretty badly as well. I am asked about Lord Howe and Lord Lawson. Does the hon. Gentleman pine for the great days of Harold Wilson? Does he think that Lord Callaghan's Government were good for business, investment and jobs in this country? Good grief! The hon. Gentleman should go to the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson); even he does not peddle that nonsense. That is the past that the Labour party is trying to bury; it is not something that it is digging up and saying that it will imitate if it ever gets back into power.

Mr. Sheerman: Surely the Chancellor will lose all credibility if he paints out of history the fact that, unlike all our major industrial competitors, the decline in British manufacturing industry, down to just below 20 per cent. of GDP, has left us with less than the critical mass necessary to fight our way back as a leading competitor.

Mr. Clarke: The condition of British manufacturing industry over the past three years has been extremely good. Manufacturing industry slowed down at the end of the last quarter of last year, but not in terms of manufacturing for consumption. There has been some destocking in terms of investment in intermediate goods. As the hon. Gentleman knows, if he meets people in manufacturing, the position has been extremely good. We are attracting more investment in manufacturing from overseas than ever before.

The hon. Member for Rotherham again gave us echoes of Labour's real self when he went on about the foreign ownership of factories. That is a good old-fashioned Labour prejudice, which Labour Members still have. We should be proud of the fact that Japanese, Koreans, Americans, Germans and Frenchmen think that this is the right place in which to invest if one wishes to manufacture goods and services.

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, although we hear all this nonsense from Opposition Members about the foreign ownership of British firms, we never hear anything at all about the substantial British ownership of firms throughout the world?

Mr. Clarke: I agree. We are the great open traders and open investors of the world. More British investment is going into the United States than there is Japanese investment. There is more overseas investment per head of the population, compared with our GDP, than is the case for any other developed country. The income from that investment contributes about 7 per cent. of our GDP and helps the prosperity of our pension funds and so on.

I will continue—enough of the 1980s. In the 1980s—*[Interruption.]* No doubt we shall have the league tables dug up again in a moment. The truth about the 1980s is that we banished some familiar ghosts; militant trade unions, penal tax rates and inefficient state industries were spectres that we faced and dealt with. In the 1990s and beyond, there are new big challenges.

International markets are becoming ever more open and integrated. Competition from the Asian tigers, from Latin America and from eastern Europe is becoming ever more fierce. Technological advance becomes ever more rapid. The British economy will have to be ever more competitive and ever better at responding to change if it is to continue to succeed. That is why we cannot have the Labour party taking over.

Inflation in Britain will have to match that in Germany and Japan, year in and year out. The Government will have to borrow less, spend less and tax less over time. That is the only way in which to create a low-tax environment in which British business has the right incentive to generate jobs, investment and wealth.

Success will require a Government who are committed to those economic principles and who have the determination to stick to them through thick and thin. The truth is that the Labour party represents the biggest single threat to the achievement of that success, and the delivery of that ambition. It has no ideas and, as we have just heard, it has old instincts which would take us back to the worst days of Harold Wilson.

I quote the words of the disillusioned Bryan Gould. Hon. Members must remember him, because he was a colleague. Quite recently, he was a leading member of the Opposition Front-Bench team, but he has now been exported to New Zealand. I quote from his article in *The Independent*. It was not written a long time ago; the quotation is from 6 November 1995, only a few months ago:

"From 1987 onwards, Labour ducked out of the battle of ideas—not a very comfortable position for a supposedly radical Party. If a discussion of ideas proved unavoidable, the Party managed to suggest—discreetly most of the time, but overtly when necessary—that it accepted much of the Thatcherite agenda. But we preferred to avoid ideas altogether. They meant too many hostages to fortune."

That is a quote from one of the most recent Front-Bench colleagues of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) agrees with every word of that quote—we know he does.

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way in a second.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the Opposition Front Benchers have not changed, and he knows that we know that he agrees with Bryan Gould and with my comments on Opposition Front Benchers.

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I shall let the hon. Gentleman say something rude about his erstwhile colleague if he wishes to curry favour with his current Front-Bench colleagues.

Mr. Skinner: I just want to get the facts straight. The Chancellor of the Exchequer talks about the views of my ex-colleague Bryan Gould on the state of the Labour party and the British economy. But he fails to tell us that, after the 1987 election, that same Bryan Gould—I remind my hon. Friends, as well as Tory Members—stood at the Dispatch Box and talked about taking over the argument on privatisation. I opposed him then. That is why I do not take too much notice of what he says now.

Mr. Clarke: Conservative members have always acknowledged the consistency of the hon. Member for Bolsover, but we have never expected any consistency from any Opposition Front-Bench Member. The fact that Bryan Gould changed his views after 1987 does not surprise me—the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has done the same thing.

The main appeal of those on the Opposition Front Bench to the City, the business world and the public is a vague implication that a Labour Government would somehow carry on our existing economic policies, give or take a little tweak or two. Labour tries to avoid frightening the voters by implying that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East would imitate me if he were to become Chancellor of the Exchequer.

There is even talk nowadays of "one-nation Labour". That is an illusion. Labour has never voted for the one-nation Conservative policies that I have proposed as Chancellor; nor has it voted for any of the policies that I and my colleagues have pursued in every office that I have held. The current Labour Front-Benchers have fought vigorously against every policy initiative I have taken in every office I have ever held, and I do not believe that they have changed their positions at all.

The clear red water between the Labour party and modern enterprise economics and public services remains as wide as ever. Labour would tax and spend and would allow inflation to rise, as the deputy Leader of the Opposition sometimes incautiously reveals. Labour would take Britain back into the relegation zones in any international league table, with the social chapter, the minimum wage and trade union legal recognition rights—all the baggage that socialism, and even social democracy, lays on the enterprise economy in Europe today.

We are facing an ever more competitive world, and we want the British people to get the best out of it. But we will only do this by keeping our competitive edge. In the 1990s, there is still no alternative to the enterprise economy that we are creating, and we have not created our present prospects to hand them over to yesterday's Wilsonian men. That is why the Prime Minister has made it clear that our Conservative goal is to make this country the enterprise centre of Europe, as that is the way to continue to succeed and prosper this year, next year and into the next century.

The reason why we are having a debate on the economy in Government time—and the reason why the Opposition never debate the economy, in their time or anybody else's—is that the Opposition know the truth of every word I have spoken about our prospects, and every word of the indictment against them.

4.13 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"rejects Government complacency about an economy in which the investment and skills gap with competitors has been growing and in which, during 17 years, the United Kingdom has fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league; notes also the Treasury Committee report which questions the Government's economic forecasts; regrets the widespread job insecurity throughout Britain; condemns the loss of the Community Action Programme which once again deprives the unemployed of a stake in society; and calls for welfare to work measures that would, over time, reduce social security bills as part of an economic strategy that would raise levels of investment in the economy, bring sustainable levels of growth without risks to inflation and end a situation in which unemployment is more than one million higher than in 1979.".

The Conservatives called this debate today to boast of the claim that they make in their motion, that Britain is

"the enterprise centre of Europe."

But today's events, with the anti-Europeans attacking the Chancellor of the Exchequer, have demonstrated that the phrase "enterprise centre of Europe" is just about the only mention of Europe that their party can tolerate without fighting breaking out in its ranks.

The Chancellor built his case on three things. He argued, first, that the league tables that we produced on Britain's relative decline were wrong; secondly, that his investment forecasts were right; and thirdly, that the feel-good factor was returning to the housing market. Before we enter the full debate, let us deal with those issues.

First, the Chancellor was unable to deny that Britain had slipped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league. It is significant that he has not been able to challenge that figure.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that it is Hong Kong and Singapore that have moved up the table and overtaken Germany, France, the United Kingdom and several other countries? That is why the numbers have changed. Perhaps he does not understand that. In that table, Britain is fast catching up with Germany and France. That casts a different light on his interpretation.

Mr. Brown: If Britain had fallen from 13th to 15th, the right hon. Gentleman might have had a point. Britain

[Mr. Brown]

has fallen from 13th to 18th. We have fallen behind Italy, Norway and Iceland. The fact is that we have fallen from 13th to 18th. *[Interruption.]* I am quoting not my research or a Labour party source, but the Government's own competitiveness review, published only last year. Does the Chancellor want to say that that review is mistaken? Does he want to withdraw it? Does he not recall that it was signed by him, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and eight other Cabinet Ministers?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No; as I pointed out, my case against the hon. Gentleman was that the fall from 13th to 16th, which is what the tables that he relies upon show, took place by 1980, when we were in 16th position. Between 1970 and 1980, we fell from 13th to 16th. We are still 16th in that league table. I pointed out that between 1981 and 1993, taking a proper international cycle, we outperformed practically everyone in the G7 and had growth well above the G7 and European averages.

Mr. Brown: The facts are that we have fallen from 13th to 18th and that most of the fall did not occur in the early 1980s, as the Chancellor was trying to tell us today. The biggest fall happened between 1990 and the present day. When we entered the 1990s, we were 14th in that league; we are now 18th. The Chancellor had better get his Treasury statisticians to check the full facts, because he is entirely wrong and will have to apologise to the House. For all his bluster this afternoon, nobody can deny the central fact that Britain has fallen down the world prosperity league under a Conservative Government.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman take the opportunity of this important debate, having regard to the fact that unemployment rates in Europe are the worst for 40 years, to repudiate on behalf of the Labour party any idea of returning to any form of exchange rate mechanism and the idea of a single currency, which has been repudiated by opinion poll after opinion poll throughout Europe?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman this morning called on the Chancellor to consider his position because of statements that he made in *The Daily Telegraph*. We support the principle of managed exchange rates, as does the Chancellor. We support the principle of monetary union, but we must consider the details of what is on offer, and we shall do that.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): The hon. Gentleman is fond of yes-or-no questions; will he answer the question that he put earlier? Is the Labour party in favour of a referendum on a single currency, yes or no?

Mr. Brown: We are absolutely clear that we are in favour of a test of opinion, whether at a general election— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* I see this afternoon something that is typical of the modern Conservative party. It is entirely a matter of honourable Gentlemen; there is not one woman on the Conservative Benches today.

The hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) asked me to give my position on the referendum; I have given it clearly. We favour a test, whether by a general election or a referendum. What is the Chancellor's position? I shall give way to him so that he can answer.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have already given a much better answer. The hon. Gentleman's answer is ridiculous—as one of my colleagues said, it would give rise to the possibility of a phone-in. We shall make up our mind on economic and monetary union in the British interest at the time—if and when it happens. Whether a referendum is required will be a question for that time. That is our position and it seems a whole lot clearer than the hon. Gentleman's.

Mr. Brown: I take it clearly from his answer that the Chancellor would resist any proposition in the Conservative party that a decision be made to hold a referendum before a general election. In other words, he is putting forward the view—Conservative Members had better get used to it—that he is against the proposition that a commitment to a referendum be included in the Conservative election manifesto. The House has understood him correctly this afternoon.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman does not have an idea in his head about anything. Can he not make up his mind? Does he know what day of the week it is? He was asked whether he was in favour of a referendum. May we have an answer?

Mr. Brown: I made the position absolutely clear— *[Laughter.]* Indeed, I did. The Chancellor made it clear to Conservative Members, and they had better understand it, that he is against the proposition that a commitment to a referendum should be included in the Conservative general election manifesto—exactly what Conservative Members have been calling on the Prime Minister to do. The Chancellor made it clear this afternoon that a decision on a referendum can be made only after the question whether we join the single currency in 1998 or 1999 comes up. It cannot be made before the general election. I understand the Chancellor perfectly correctly, as I think the whole House now does. That is the source of division in the Conservative party.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will the hon. Gentleman clear up the matter completely? He said that it would be put to the test—either in a general election or by some other means. If the currency went ahead during the next Government, and were Labour in government, the Labour party would not have set out the position in its manifesto. So, does he or does he not agree that there would be a referendum on the issue—yes or no?

Mr. Brown: I made the position absolutely clear. It is for the Government to make their position absolutely clear. The hon. Gentleman may want to attack me this afternoon, but he was on the radio attacking the Chancellor this morning.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I really must progress, but because there is so much interest, I shall give way.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we are to have a referendum, it is useful if we all know

what it is to be about? A few moments ago, he said that the Labour party believed in managed exchange rates. If the managed exchange rate takes the form of membership of a single European currency, who does he think will be managing that exchange rate—will it be the British Chancellor or the German Chancellor?

Mr. Brown: I have read the Maastricht treaty, unlike the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and I understand the position very clearly. The principle that I am talking about is that of a single currency. The details obviously have to be considered. When we have made up our mind about them, we shall put that view to the country. It will be put to the test in either a general election or a referendum,. and we have made that position clear. What is amazing this afternoon is that Conservative Members have still not grasped from the Chancellor's answers the important fact that he is refusing to support the idea of a referendum being inserted in the Conservative general election manifesto. He cannot deny that fact.

The second issue that the Chancellor raised was that, because he could now see that investment forecasts for 1996 were going to be realised, he thought that the economy could grow at 3 per cent. He has a history on investment forecasts, and we should understand what he has been saying for the past few years. Last year, he told us in his Budget statement that investment would rise by 10 per cent. In fact, it rose by only 2 per cent. He has been wrong every year that he has been Chancellor, and he has been wrong by substantial figures.

If the Conservative party were right, from the beginning of the 1990s, investment would have increased by more than 30 per cent., according to its forecasts. It has barely increased. The one consistent fact about the Chancellor's investment forecasts is that they are wrong. I read only the other day that the head of the Meteorological Office had to return his performance-related bonus because he had consistently got the weather forecast wrong. The Chancellor is wrong in his forecasts on investment, the public sector borrowing requirement and growth, so perhaps he should look at his own pay arrangements.

When the Chancellor tells us that investment this year might rise by about 10 per cent.. I agree with the Select Committee—on which there are Conservative Members. Without further explanation from the Chancellor, I doubt whether that forecast is credible. Conservative Members must face up to the fact that, as a result of the recession in the 1980s, we have the slowest ever growth in investment—slower than even in the 1930s. If we are to build the modern capacity that is necessary to achieve high levels of sustainable growth without increasing inflation and interest rates, we must close the investment gap with our competitors, which is noted again in the Government's competitiveness report.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The hon. Gentleman aspires to be Chancellor of the Exchequer. If he wants to be taken seriously as a contender for that role, he will have to make up his mind about the following fundamental issues. Should we have inflation targets or should we not? Is the present one too high, too low or about right? Are interest rates too high, too low or about right? Is Government spending too high, too low or about right? Whenever we have an economic debate, the hon. Gentleman avoids those questions. Has he yet made up his mind and, if so, will he take the opportunity of today's debate to give the country the answers to those fundamental questions?

Mr. Brown: Of course, we shall have an inflation target. If the hon. Gentleman believes that public spending is too high, the reason is that we are paying the high cost of unemployment. The proper way to solve our problems is to have a Government who are serious about dealing with long-term and youth unemployment.

The Chancellor presented the House with his rosiest ever forecasts. He said that, as he had made pessimistic forecasts before, we should take these ones seriously. Let us recall the most recent published minutes of his meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England and quote what they agreed in January:

"Manufacturing output weak, housing market flat, short-term prospects for growth uncertain, extent and timing of firms' destocking unclear, growth below trend."

The document continued:

"Manufacturing output had declined fractionally. The construction sector had contracted again, the housing turnover had continued to fall, the new homes sector remained weak, the housing market fairly flat."

If that is not a damning picture, showing the gap between Conservative rhetoric and the reality that has to be expressed at meetings between the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England, I do not know what is. It is just another example of the Conservative good news machine trying to create a good impression among people who are still suffering a great deal as a result of tax rises and job insecurity. The Conservatives are trying to build up a picture simply to fight a general election.

We have had many economic debates in the past 17 years when the Conservatives have been in power. Each time, the Conservatives find a new phrase to justify what they are trying to do. At the beginning of the 1980s, we heard about the triumph of monetarism. That was no longer heard about after the money supply ran out of control. In the mid to late 1980s, the Conservatives claimed to have created an economic miracle. We no longer hear about that as it caused the biggest recession since the war. Had there been an economic debate before the previous general election, they would have told us that they had created the biggest ever programme of tax cuts. We no longer hear about that, as 21 big tax rises have given Britain the greatest tax rises in history.

What is consistent about the Conservatives is that they pull out a phrase such as golden scenario, enterprise capital or centre of Europe, use it for a few months until reality dawns and they cannot justify the figures, and then bury it unceremoniously and move on to another variety of Conservative central office propaganda. The country will not be fooled by the Conservative party.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): The hon. Gentleman cannot shrug off a question about the inflation rate merely by saying that Labour would have a target—particularly in the light of the fact that the Labour party does not have any credibility on that front, as the average inflation rate was 15½ per cent. when it was last in government. As investment depends on a stable economy, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House exactly what his inflation target would be?

Mr. Brown: I have made it absolutely clear: we will set an inflation target. We shall consult the Governor of

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the Bank of England—as the Chancellor does and considers to be very important—and other interested parties, including Government advisers, and then we shall set our inflation target. I cannot make it any clearer than that.

The Chancellor boasts about inflation, but he should face the fact that last week we discovered that Britain is not top of the European Community inflation league—it is not second or third, but 10th. Far from the Chancellor's record being magnificent, as he claims, the Conservative Government have had a very poor record over the past 17 years.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: No; I have given way sufficiently during my speech.

The Conservatives should face two facts about the British economy, but they refuse to do so. First, there is not only widespread job insecurity in the economy, but a responsibility on the part of Government to adjust their policies to tackle that problem. Secondly—as has been mentioned already—investment in this country is neglected. We cannot cast that fact aside and say that it is irrelevant at the point at which the economy begins to grow. Long-term neglect of investment is the single biggest reason why we have grown more slowly than most of our competitors since 1979, why our share of world trade is now at the lowest level this century, and why we have learned in the past week that we are importing more manufactured goods than we export and that British consumers are buying more foreign-made goods than those made by British firms. The decline of British manufacturing industry is a sad indictment on the Conservative Government.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: No, I shall not give way again; I have given way enough times during the debate. I think that it is about time that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) put his questions directly to the Chancellor, because he is criticising the Chancellor, not me.

I draw the attention of the House to a study of unemployment conducted by the Central Statistical Office. The Chancellor boasted a great deal about the Government's record in that area. In the past decade, the Central Statistical Office has created a new database—the JUVOS database—which it calls a unique source of longitudinal information. It shows very clearly what is happening to people around the country who are worried about their jobs.

According to the study, 8.7 million people—5.8 million men and 2.9 million women—have suffered a spell of unemployment since the previous general election. This is the Government who fought the 1992 election on the basis of their claim that people would be more secure if the Conservatives were elected. The Conservatives must face the fact that there is a fear of unemployment and job insecurity: it affects every region, every occupation and every class.

New policies must be implemented to deal with that problem. When the Prime Minister assumed his position in 1990, he said that he wanted a nation at ease with itself—a classless society; an opportunity Britain. However, the study states in its own words that approximately 10.5 million different people have experienced a spell of unemployment since 1990. It continues:

"Approximately one quarter of the work force were affected by a spell of unemployment during the period."

Those are astonishingly huge figures. The President of the Board of Trade is in the Chamber this afternoon: he should apologise to the House for saying that job insecurity is only in the mind. It is reality for millions of people up and down the country, in every class and in every occupation.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): If the hon. Gentleman does me the compliment of quoting me, will he do the House the courtesy of quoting me accurately? What he said is not what I said.

Mr. Brown: While I look for the quotation, perhaps the President of the Board of Trade can tell me what he did say. *[Interruption.]* What the President of the Board of Trade said—and I stand to be corrected—is that job insecurity is only a state of mind.

Mr. Lang: I shall have the opportunity to reply to the debate later on. The hon. Gentleman mentioned job security and job insecurity. What matters is which Government and which party have the right policies to reduce that insecurity. The figures that the hon. Gentleman has given the House simply show the rapid flow of people out of unemployment back into employment. Will he tell us by how much employment has risen in the past few years and, therefore, how many job opportunities have been created as a result of the Government's policies?

Mr. Brown: I note that the President of the Board of Trade has not corrected me and given us the proper quotation. It appears that he has something to hide on the subject.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment issued a press statement this afternoon, which stated that 750,000 fewer people were unemployed now than in 1992. What her press statement did not say is that there are 250,000 fewer people in employment now than since that date in 1992. If the President of the Board of Trade and the Chancellor faced up to the fact that job insecurity is widespread and needs new policies to deal with it—and that it is not a lack of moral fibre that prevents people from getting jobs—we would do better. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor asks, "What new policies?" I shall tell him. The first action that I would take would be to refuse to abolish the community action programme, which he will abolish at the end of the month.

Will the Chancellor explain to us why that programme—which was set up to give help to 30,000 long-term unemployed people; which was extended for three years in the 1994 Budget because, as he and his colleagues said, it was a success; which all the voluntary organisations that had a part in it welcomed; and which

an Employment Minister called a testimony to the Government's willingness to deal with the problem of unemployment—will be abolished at the end of the month? Why is that happening?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It will be replaced by better and more cost-effective programmes.

We have reduced unemployment by more than 750,000 and increased the total number of people in work by 500,000 through our policies for the long-term unemployed, including the family credit proposals and the national insurance holiday for employers, which will come into effect in April. That is how we have reduced long-term unemployment and increased job security.

As far as I am aware, the new policies that the Labour party suggests include the social chapter and the minimum wage, which would destroy employment. What other employment-creating measures does the Labour party have? It does not have policies on inflation, taxation, public spending or any other economic issue.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The House will know my views on interventions. They should be short, even from Front Benchers.

Mr. Brown: The Chancellor said that the community action programme will be replaced by another programme. Will he tell us what it is?

Mr. Clarke: I cannot remember its name. A whole series of programmes, produced by the Department for Education and Employment, have been effective in reducing long-term unemployment and increasing opportunities for people to move from unemployment into work. The hon. Gentleman tries to obfuscate that by choosing one programme which he likes and which is now being phased out because it has been judged alongside other programmes and is not cost-effective.

The hon. Gentleman got me to my feet because I wished to challenge him on his policies. The social chapter and the minimum wage would destroy jobs. What polices does he have to compensate for that?

Mr. Brown: The Chancellor does not know which programme has replaced the community action programme, but 30,000 places have gone and very little has replaced them. The reason that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment gave when she scrapped the programme was not that she would replace it with something else. She said that it was not needed. There are 800,000 long-term unemployed, and the Government's attitude is that that programme is not needed. There is anger among voluntary organisations, charities, community groups and others who have been involved in that programme. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has stated:

"A programme that was helping the unemployed back into work and giving them skills has simply been scrapped by the Government to save £70 million of money."

Let us remember that—

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again.

A Minister at the Department for Education and Employment said that the programme's very existence was clear evidence of the Government's determination to tackle unemployment. What signal is sent by the programme's abolition? It is one that most of the country will understand. We, the Opposition, are prepared to say that, with a windfall levy on private utilities, we would create opportunities for work for young people under 25 and tackle the problem of long-term unemployment. The Government are prepared to accept a situation where 800,000 people have been unemployed for more than a year and 600,000 young people under 25 are out of work. In addition, there is 30 per cent. youth unemployment in many areas of our inner cities. Black youth unemployment in central London is 60 per cent. The Government are prepared to leave a situation that is socially divisive and causes a huge loss of economic output. They are not prepared to take the necessary action.

The central question about the future of the economy is how we shall create the necessary investment to ensure that we can build the future that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was talking about, but to which he has not, over recent years, directed his forecasts. The question will not be solved by Conservative Members. It will certainly not be solved by Conservative central office. Conservatives give the impression that every problem that the United Kingdom faces has already been solved. We have speeches such as those made by the Deputy Prime Minister. His speech on Friday was entitled "The Mood is Changing". That was just after the debate on the Scott report. He talked about a "new sense of optimism" and claimed that we face the "best economic circumstances" for a generation. He then talked about

"urban resurgence in parts of rundown Britain not witnessed since the last century."

I am aware that I have often been accused of doom and gloom by Conservative Members. I am aware also that there is activity in the building trade round the country. There is some significant inner urban development. Building works are taking place. They are big works on a grand scale. They are the brainchildren of grand visions. There is a development here and there with which the Chancellor is intimately associated. I must tell the House, however, that even with the best will in the world, the extension of the Deputy Prime Minister's office, however grand it may be, does not add up to an

"urban resurgence . . . not witnessed since the last century."

Adding another floor or two to the ministry of propaganda will convince no one that the real economy is flourishing.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I am not giving way again, because I am nearing the end of my remarks.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Brown: Conservative Members are anxious to intervene. But what do they really think about the feel-good factor? Is there not one good barometer of what the feel-good factor is for the Conservative party? It is that 52 Conservative Members are retiring at the next general election, many of them in their 40s and 50s. Thirteen Conservative Members are relocating from marginal seats to not-yet marginal seats, which they will be fighting at

[Mr. Brown]

the next election. Is not that the most reliable measure of what they see at first hand under a Conservative Government? They say that we have the best prospects for a generation, but what do they do? We know that 52 are leaving. They say that for the next 10 years, Britain will have the best set of circumstances throughout Europe, but what do they do? Thirteen are moving to other constituencies, so that they will have majorities. To use a phrase of Conservative central office, they say one thing and do another. That is what happens under the Government.

Until the Conservative party faces the investment gap in the economy, we shall not solve the long-term problems. The solutions to those problems have eluded the Government. They are responsible for our decline in relation to our competitors abroad. Promises made by the Government have been broken. That is why people are angry. They feel that their trust in regard to taxation, public services and even public borrowing has been betrayed by the Government's failure to keep the promises that the Conservative party made at the general election.

People saw at first hand the Government's failure to keep their promises with the Budget in November, which we can now discuss. We have seen the Conservatives give with one hand a small tax cut, but at the same time introduce council tax increases, increases in prescription charges, rent rises and rail fare rises. New mortgage protection schemes are costing more. Water bills and petrol bills have increased. Vehicle duty has increased. An ordinary nurse has not even been given the benefit of a full national public sector settlement. She is in a position where a small tax cut is having to be paid for by huge increases in bills that she must meet, including the rise in council tax for which the Conservative party must take responsibility. That rise is the result of the Government's settlement.

It will soon be 17 years since the Conservative party came to power. The Government said when introducing their first Budget that their responsibility was to end the relative decline that Britain had suffered. The then Chancellor said that ending that relative decline was the central issue. We know from this debate that ending the relative decline has not happened under this Government. We have fallen behind many of our competitors abroad. We know also that Britain's share of world trade is at its lowest this century and that it has fallen substantially during the 17 years of Conservative government. We know that, far from the manufacturing trade deficit being solved, that deficit continues to cause us problems.

No slogans, no expensive posters and billboard advertising, and no speeches by the Deputy Prime Minister, will obscure the central fact that the Conservative party has failed on the economy, taxation and public services. It will not be able to con people at the election, whenever it comes. The Tory lie machine will fail.

Look at what has happened to the Conservative Government. In 1983, they had a majority of 140. In 1987, it was 101. Even in 1992, they could boast of a majority of 21. The Government are now down to a majority of one and they are poised to take their leave of government. They have lost all authority. They have lost any credibility that they might have had. They are rapidly losing their majority. All that is left to them now is to lose office. For the millions whose trust has been betrayed, whose prospects have been blighted and whose hopes they still deny, that leaving cannot come too soon.

4.46 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has given a most excellent account of his stewardship of the economy, an account which the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) failed to dent in the slightest respect. What my right hon. and learned Friend had to say is extremely encouraging.

When we begin to study the not always reliable media both here and abroad, it is extraordinary how the concept of Britain has changed. Britain is seen now not as a failure or a salutary warning to others but as a model that demonstrates how to adapt, deregulate and modernise economies.

I can remember that, when I first entered the House, there was a tremendous cry from the party of Tony Crosland, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and others that we must all follow the Swedish model. That was the thing. We were told that we must all see how the Swedes managed their social security spending, for example. That has long gone. Unfortunately, the Swedish example did not work in the end. It blew up and the Swedes had to introduce completely different policies.

People are now coming to the United Kingdom from throughout the world and studying the British model. They are saying, "How did they have the political guts to push through all sorts of measures, with the Opposition"—it was the Labour party in the 1980s—"resisting every one of them, to lay the foundation for the British model?" I accept that it may have many faults, but it seems to have the qualities of flexibility and adaptability to meet current circumstances. It is an exciting state of affairs to have reached.

I greatly admire my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor for the way in which he has seized the opportunities that difficult struggles have provided. He has built up a British model which, as I have said, others admire. It is not only Conservatives who take that view—it is shared by the foreign press throughout the world. The model is admired by people who are far away from British politics, not only by Conservative central office.

I want to add only two messages to the account that my right hon. and learned Friend presented so excellently and with such panache. First, in the new trading conditions, there has been a shift in the centre of gravity, in both economics and politics, from Europe and the Atlantic countries to Asia. That is not a threat. Those who see the Asian challenge as a threat will make entirely the wrong policy judgments. It is a challenge that offers us a colossal opportunity. The whole of our policy and our industrial effort from now on—and for some years past—needs to be built around the ability to seize those opportunities.

My second message, which I want to sketch out briefly, is that the United Kingdom is superbly positioned to take advantage of the opportunities. I fully concede that Opposition Members, or anyone else, might say that it has all been a long time coming, that many years have passed and that, to put it mildly, not everything has gone right. I remember making an endless number of speeches in the

1960s and 1970s—a long time ago—hopefully asserting that just around the corner was a high rate of growth and low inflation, that it would be sustainable, that we would have falling unemployment, high productivity, a strong economic performance generally and that sterling would be able to look other currencies in the face and be strong. One hoped for those things. Opposition Members and Labour and Conservative Governments all set the same objectives. Everyone tried very hard to the best of their lights, sometimes with disastrous policies and sometimes with successful ones.

What is extraordinary about the situation today, which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has not begun to grasp, is that those things are now happening. We are delivering low inflation, sustained performance and export performance in all areas—not just in manufactures, which is an old-fashioned concept, but in a wide range of foreign earnings activities throughout the planet. We are delivering superb productivity. We are the dominant magnet for foreign investment from outside Europe. Asian investment is pouring in—40 to 45 per cent. of all investment from outside Europe comes into the United Kingdom.

We are also, as my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) rightly reminded us, a gigantic overseas investor with worldwide interests and huge invisible earnings from our tradeable services and from dividends and investments. That all gives the country a power that it has not had for 30 years.

When the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East talks about the narrow trade figures, he does not understand that, in the global economy, one has to measure the remittances and the profits that are generated by British firms with huge subsidiaries overseas. Those are the profits that come back to this country, even though the figures do not show up in the exports, because the goods have been sold in the market overseas. His emphasis on the old-fashioned economic aggregate concepts, including the trade statistics, is completely wrong. He does not understand the nature of the modern global economy.

It is not just in the statistics that the new situation has to be interpreted and seen. It is quite extraordinary—one almost has to pinch oneself to believe it—that 60 of the 100 largest corporations in Europe have their headquarters in London. It is quite extraordinary that banks are not gathering in Frankfurt, which is supposed to be the centre of the financial system of the European region, but coming to London. They are fighting for space in the City of London.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East talked about our being marginalised, isolated and so on, and about our not being in the centre of Europe. The financial wizards of Europe take a different view and are seeking to come to London and acquire assets and enterprises here at a great rate. I fully declare my interest and involvement in the financial world. The financial wizards are demonstrating that, far from Frankfurt being the centre of things, London is increasingly not only the enterprise centre but the financial motor of the entire European region and, indeed, the wider region as well. That goes beyond the statistics and demonstrates just how powerful and attractive the British model is proving to be.

Then there are the exports. It is not just a matter of products, manufactures, metal bashing and so on. The entire pattern of trade is changing, and there is ever greater emphasis on tradeable services. This country is extremely good at tradeable services. The British market share of financial services is overwhelming: 80 per cent. of all international funds are managed in London and other UK financial centres, mainly Edinburgh and Glasgow. It is not just finance. Other tradeable services, such as educational products, consultancy services, accountancy, scientific research, management skills, civil engineering, military and law enforcement training packages and a variety of other products are the resources that the British are extremely good at.

The most attractive prospect of all is the fact that those are the products that the great expanding markets of Asia want. Those are the information-intensive and technology-intensive products that will fit into the booming markets of the next 20 years. People think of products, as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East does, as manufactures, as motor cars and laptops. Asia will not want them, as it can make them cheaply and to the highest quality. It wants the management skills that this island is very good at providing, and which are getting better all the time. What is more, we have a particularly good advantage. Sometimes I would like to urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to build on that advantage a little more than they have. We have in the Commonwealth a fantastic club network—an entrée into all the new markets—of a kind not available to our immediate competitors and neighbours in Europe. The more we build on that, and on the fact that almost all the business of the planet is conducted in English, the better.

A considerable and forceful Labour leader of the past, a bigger figure than many we see today, I fear—Ernie Bevin—once described this country as an island

"almost made of coal and surrounded by fish".

Our coal now has to compete with that from other countries and I had better not say any more about the fish—but most of them have gone—so we have to look to other resources.

I am indebted to Sir David Puttnam—I do not believe that he is a Tory supporter, but he is an excellent fellow—for saying the other day that this country is an island of creativity surrounded by a sea of understanding. That "sea" is the enormous reach of British culture and language into every part of the global system. That is the opportunity for us. It is not just the future—we are exploiting it now.

Our audio-visual industries, which already employ more people than the whole motor components industry, are racing ahead. We are the second largest CD-ROM publisher in the world. We hold a massive chunk of the fast-expanding market for electronic education systems—and so we should given that the entire electronically stored information supply around the world is in English, that an estimated 1 billion people are learning English, and that the Internet is in English. It should be a marvellous opportunity for us and it will be, provided that we do not attack enterprise and undermine educational excellence, which would set us back and let the Americans take all the opportunities.

The picture that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor painted was not only accurate but rather modest. It understated the colossal opportunities that are already being exploited by this economy and which are showing up in the figures.

[Mr. David Howell]

Now we come to investment, about which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East made much. He alleged that we have failed—or are failing—in the investment league. In fact, personal savings—the idea that savings are related to investment may be old-fashioned, but it is one that I hold—are rising, and the general habit of saving up a bit and investing in shares and other routes has spread vastly during the Conservative years.

I feel very proud that the dreams of two or three decades ago of a property-owning democracy and a capital-owning democracy—the great projects promised by my party—have duly been delivered, while Opposition Members have mumbled, although I do not think that we heard it today, about stakeholding, which is yesterday's story and should be put aside. We are moving to a completely different pattern of ownership and a completely different society.

As for investment, we should try to clarify some of the figures. While Japan led the field in investment growth between 1980 and 1994 which, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, is a reasonable time scale to measure, Britain was second, with an annual growth rate of investment two thirds higher than that of Germany and 90 per cent. higher than that of France. I take my figures from very detailed analyses in *The Wall Street Journal*, which I have no reason to question. They are just as reliable, if not more so, than those given by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

In real per capita income growth, between 1980 and 1994, Britain stood fifth among the world's richest nations and—this is the point that the hon. Gentleman did not pick up—it is closing the gap steadily with the United States, Canada, Germany and France. Among the 10 largest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, Britain was second, at 74 per cent.—beaten only by Switzerland—in the proportion of the working population that it absorbed into the labour force over that period.

All that stuff about our dropping from 13th to 18th in the league table, which seemed to be the main platform of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, is a canard. In 1980, Britain was in 16th position. It is now in 18th position, because Hong Kong and Singapore have overtaken us. They have also overtaken Germany and France, as I observed earlier, and we are now breathing down the necks of Germany and France. That is not surprising. In terms of income per head, we are now six percentage points behind Germany and three behind France, and the gap is closing as—I take no great joy from this; in fact, it is a worry—those two countries become increasingly bogged down in layers of regulation, state control, subsidy and uncompetitive practices. Britain has been a pioneer in throwing off those shackles.

Mr. Redwood: Does my right hon. Friend find it strange, as I do, that although the shadow Chancellor says that he wants to get investment up and unemployment down, his two main policy recommendations that differ from the Government's are the adoption of the social chapter and a return to the exchange rate mechanism, linking us to the deutschmark rather than the dollar? Surely those are the very two policies that have led to much higher unemployment in France and Germany, and to some of the other problems that my right hon. Friend is describing.

Mr. Howell: No, I do not find that strange. I know that new Labour is trying, but it is still stuck in an intellectual time warp. It does not understand what is happening to the modern economies of Europe—economies such as Germany's—which have not deregulated fast and have concentrated on rather outdated concepts of heavy manufacturing. Those economies now face desperate circumstances.

Germany is having to put up taxes, and take-home pay there is said to be no higher than here—possibly lower. The same applies to France and other European countries—because they are having to invest outside. Siemens is going to Newcastle, not because of low wages—take-home pay here is just as high as it is in Germany—but because we have a deregulated, open economy, that enables it to jump into the new world markets outside Europe. Volkswagen is to go to Alsace—outside Germany. Germany is investing massively in the admittedly low-wage areas of eastern Europe, and in Asia. The net effect is that the German economy is ceasing to be the wonder machine that it has been for the past 30 years.

I forecast—I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor cannot—that the mark is in for a fall: that the deutschmark will move down as sterling moves up. I believe that the mark will go the same way as the almighty dollar, the unchallengeable currency of the 1950s and 1960s. Look at what has happened to it since. I expect to see grave difficulties in both our neighbouring countries—France and Germany. That should cause us all sorts of worries, but the one thing that we should not do is copy them. On the contrary, we should encourage them to come and view the British model, as they have been doing.

My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. The picture that he paints is enormously encouraging. I recognise that we have many social problems, but the point is that we can build on success rather than on the crumbling edifice of incompetence and failure with which we found that we had been left when we came into government in 1979. Lagging Britain is yesterday's story, presented by yesterday's men and women. It is not only very boring, but inaccurate and out of date.

I see the need for the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East—and, indeed, the whole Labour party, as it prepares for the great election that lies ahead—to "do a Harold Wilson". The trick is somehow to convey the idea that the whole of society is fracturing and falling apart, that people such as the genial Mr. Will Hutton, who wrote the ludicrous book "The State We're In", are right—that everything is going wrong, and that investment is down. Labour must try to prove the truth of that vision.

Harold Wilson was extremely clever—and lucky. He was able to secure figures to support his claim that the Tories were not doing well, that things were falling apart and that he would put everything right. The problem for today's Opposition Front Bench is that the script is not turning out as they want. There are no figures to confirm that things are falling apart, that our country's performance is lagging behind that of others and that we are isolated and a passenger in Europe. Indeed, the figures show that we are leading the pack, that we are the

pace-setter, that we have the kind of economy that is suited to the 21st century, that others are trying to copy us, that our investment is rising in the outside world and that we are now gaining a dominant position in the great markets of the future—particularly as trade now follows investment, and our investment, and the trade that follows it, are beginning to score.

I draw confidence—though not complacency, I hope—from the excellent picture that my right hon. and learned Friend has painted. Nothing in Labour's analysis seems to connect with today's and tomorrow's problems and challenges. I believe that, if we understand what is really going on in the global economy, we in the Conservative party will be able to rise to the challenge and see Britain through to the prosperity for which we have fought for so many years.

5.4 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) drew attention to a fascinating aspect of Tory party policy: the way in which the Tories always take some accidental by-product of their own incompetence, and then trumpet it as though it were the new philosopher's stone of economics—the new discovery that will lead the country, and indeed the world, to greatness. In the early 1980s, British manufacturing industry was being closed down on a massive scale. The great discovery then was of lean, mean, fit, dynamic manufacturing. We were told that those that survived the process of anorexia were ready to take on the world, lean, mean and dynamic—before so many of them closed.

Then there was the great discovery of low inflation. That is not difficult to achieve, if enough people are put out of work and made to fear for their jobs. The credit explosion of the late 1980s gave people control over their own credit, allowing it to be used as a lever for economic growth; that discovery seems to have come from Roger Douglas in New Zealand. In 1990, there was the exchange rate mechanism. Suddenly, we were going to be at the heart of Europe, committed to Europe and to working within the ERM. That was to be the basis of economic management and control over inflation.

The contribution of George Soros to Government economic policy was not sufficiently recognised by the Chancellor today. In so far as the right hon. and learned Gentleman has had any success at all in economic policy, that success is largely because Mr. Soros forced us out of the ERM. Thanks to him, we discovered export-led growth, which was to be the new dynamic. Somehow, however, it has not quite materialised. The latest boast concerns financial services and the financial sector of the economy—the enterprise capital of Europe. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) treated us to a litany on that subject, but, although the factors that he listed have boosted services—especially financial services—they have done little for jobs and the fundamental strength of the economy.

That sector was to be the new enterprise capital of Europe because it would be a deregulated, cheap-labour, de-unionised economy with low social costs, providing an attractive base for foreign investment. Japan, Korea and America, for instance, would see it as a kind of Mulberry harbour enabling the invasion of Europe, because of the low taxes on business.

Unfortunately, that sector cannot substantially lower unemployment, which is the curse of the economy. Unemployment is still far too high, and, as it has fallen, no great improvement or surge in public finances has followed. Most people returning to work are taking casual, part-time jobs that are not particularly well paid. Many are still receiving income support. The tax take therefore does not rise, the benefits spend does not fall substantially and we still have an horrendous public sector deficit. This year's borrowing level will be about as high as last year's, despite the Chancellor's persistently expressed hope that he will bring it down and that we are moving towards a balanced position. We are not; we are accumulating an increasingly heavy deadweight of borrowing for future generations to bear.

The revival for which the Government hoped—that, indeed, they boasted about—is not there. Certainly, it has not been experienced in the Grimsby area: business people there have not observed the surge of enterprise and dynamism described by the Chancellor. They have not experienced the surge in demand or the enormous improvement in export markets that the Chancellor spoke of, essentially because there has not been a real revival in the base on which the economy rests, which is manufacturing. Manufacturing is the base that makes things in this country and supplies them to the world.

Most of our deficit is in manufactured trade. Most of world trade is still in manufactures, but our economy's manufacturing base has shrunk drastically, to below the level of viability. Manufacturing has not only to generate jobs—though it can never generate jobs on the old scale—but to support more jobs and a healthier superstructure of services, and to generate the economic growth to spread the well-being that makes people feel better off.

In the 1980s—I am afraid that it is still going on—we lost more than 3 million jobs in manufacturing; we experienced more shrinkage than any of our competitors. Manufacturing production is still around its 1990 level, and only a few percentage points above its 1973 level. That appalling record has not been matched by other economies, most of which have substantially increased production since 1973. We have not, and all the problems of the British economy rest on that fact.

Import penetration of domestic manufactures markets, which was about 17 per cent. in 1970, has risen to about half of demand. Our share of world trade in manufactures has decreased. That is the cause of our long-term failure, and there cannot be a real and substantial recovery in the British economy unless it is remedied. The factors mentioned by the right hon. Member for Guildford are flashes in the pan without a firm base to support them, which is required to pay our way in the world.

Mr. David Howell: The hon. Gentleman would find it easier to reconcile events with his thesis if he accepted that the concept of manufactures, which he keeps using, is very narrow. Nowadays, a manufactured product—even this pen or this piece of paper—requires a vast range of information and knowledge services in its manufacture, from research and design right through to marketing and sales. The service content of any manufacture gives it power and the ability to penetrate world markets. Because he keeps talking about manufactures, he has not noticed

[Mr. David Howell]

that the service content of manufactures is constantly becoming more dynamic and delivering the type of results that puzzle him.

Mr. Mitchell: I am happy for the right hon. Gentleman's lesson in monetarist economics to continue, if he wants, but the fact is that all those services rest on a healthy manufacturing base. Our base has shrunk because it has long been unprofitable to produce manufactures in this country, due to policies of dear money and an over-valued exchange rate. The test is whether it is profitable to manufacture in this country, and it has not been. That has been demonstrated by our sending many manufacturing processes to overseas manufacturers and reserving assembly for people in this country—a sort of "Amstradisation" of the British economy.

We need all those services. I am not arguing about their importance, or about the need to increase and upgrade those and other skills and to introduce more of the information technology that the right hon. Member for Guildford talked about—Robert Reich is preaching that in the United States—but the essential point is that a healthy manufacturing base is required to sustain such expansion.

We still need to make the basic items because most world trade is still in manufactures, and we pay our way through them or we run a deficit. As the manufacturing base shrinks, so does our ability to pay taxes and to support healthy public sector finances. We have a public sector deficit because we have put so many people out of work and they are not contributing to the tax take or to economic growth. That is the legacy of 17 years of overvaluation and dear money.

The lessons of what has gone wrong under the Conservatives are far too obvious to need reiterating. The Labour party has long emphasised those lessons. The problem is that we have a lame, limping and inadequate recovery, which is now petering out effectively because the Chancellor has blown it. After the devaluation, which occurred because we were pushed out of the exchange rate mechanism—

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mitchell: No.

After that devaluation, we should have gone for growth. That was our chance to recover the ground lost, particularly in competition with Europe. The Government assumed instead that we had economic growth and an export-led miracle and that they did not have to do anything more about it. They should have sustained the growth. The Chancellor then deflated the economy by increasing taxation and kept the difference between actual interest rates and inflation too high—at almost double the historic average for real interest rates since the second world war. To compound that, in 1994, he increased interest rates when they should have been decreased again to sustain expansion in demand and to lower sterling so that our exports were more competitive and imports were penalised.

That example shows the folly of a system in which the Governor of the Bank of England is given a bully pulpit to preach his reactionary views on economic policy and to make his insistent demands for ever higher interest rates. It is the wisdom of the parrot. When anything goes wrong or anything has to be said, the Governor automatically parrots, "Put up interest rates." Providing him with that pulpit, from which he can exacerbate the fears of an always nervous financial community, ties the Chancellor's hands and creates an impossible pressure for higher interest rates.

The Governor's advice in 1994 was absolutely wrong. We should have done the opposite and brought interest rates down to expand the economy. Even since then, there has been consistent pressure against a reduction in interest rates, which should be lowered by a couple of per cent. to bring down the pound, stimulate exports, penalise imports and allow us to expand the economy. That pressure is still on because the Governor is obsessed with the fear of inflation.

Inflation is not currently a problem. We can and should take risks with inflation. If not inflation, what will bring down the heavy burden of the dead-weight debt that the Chancellor is accumulating? This year, the public sector deficit will be almost as big as it was last year, which is just another massive addition of debt. I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman might want to keep the public sector deficit within the Maastricht criteria—just as other European countries are being squeezed and deflated, in an anti-Keynesian fashion, to meet those artificial criteria—but, in a deflationary situation, all that debt is a dead weight imposed on the economy.

In the early 1950s, public sector debt was about 200 per cent. of GDP. In 1931, it was 150 per cent. of GDP. What brought it down? It was not the expansion of the economy but inflation. We need inflation to float us off the rocks of debt that have trapped not only our economy but, even more so, the European economies and every householder and person with an overdraft in this country. We can take risks because we need to expand the economy.

While Europe is in a deflationary welter because of the obsession with the Maastricht criteria, this is our chance to improve our trading position, to increase our exports to Europe, to win back the markets that we have lost and to reverse the flow of imports to win back the jobs we need. The Chancellor is just not taking that opportunity. I do not mind that he is not achieving economic growth and the feel-good factor that he needs to stand any chance in the election, but I do mind the disastrous damage that those policies are still inflicting on the manufacturing sector, which is central to our economy.

For all his ebullience and bounce, the Chancellor has been far too over-awed by the persistent counsels of caution from the Governor of the Bank of England, who has been put in far too strong a position by these regular discussions. The need now is to do a better deal for manufacturing industry and its prospects—by getting interest rates and the pound down to more competitive levels, and by giving a boost to the growth that this country needs.

5.19 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I was disappointed but not surprised by the tone of the shadow Chancellor's speech. Yet again, he talked down Britain's achievements of the past 16 years. He also indirectly insulted the people in my constituency who have done an

enormous amount, in the manufacturing and service sectors, to improve productivity and competitiveness and to make their firms among the most competitive in the world.

The Labour party needs reminding of the fact that when it left office—thank heavens, a long time ago—the British ambassador in Paris referred to the British economy as the sick man of Europe. Most of us can remember the Europeans looking down on our economy and regarding it as some sort of sick joke because of its low productivity and appalling strike record. In 1979, for instance, about 29 million days were lost to strikes. We suffered from the Red Robbo syndrome: complete industrial inflexibility.

By contrast, the president of the German CBI, Mr. Henkel, felt able to say only a month ago that the British economy is the best placed in Europe to deal with the challenges of global competitiveness—such has been the transformation. The British economy has made remarkable strides in productivity, competitiveness and the flexibility necessary to deal with global market challenges. This was the analysis of a man who ought to know—a man from a country that used to regard ours as the sick man of Europe.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was not inventing his figures when he talked about the achievements of the past few years. Output has been growing for no fewer than 15 consecutive quarters. This year, growth—even on the most conservative estimates, and irrespective of whether we agree with the Chancellor's forecasts—is expected to run at about 2.6 per cent.

A poll of GDP forecasts for next year conducted by *The Economist* clearly shows that Britain, with 3.1 per cent., is forecast to have easily the highest growth of any country in the OECD or the developed world outside Australia, which is 0.1 per cent. ahead of us.

All this has had an impact in my constituency and on employment prospects there. Britain is the only country in Europe where unemployment has fallen significantly in the past four years, dropping by 770,000. Since the 1992 general election, unemployment in Wyre Forest has fallen by no less than a third—and these are not part-time or temporary jobs, which account for only 7 per cent. of the total. That 7 per cent. is itself one of the lowest figures in Europe. In human terms this means that 1,400 people who did not have a job in 1992 have entered good, competitive jobs in my constituency as a result of what the shadow Chancellor would call the "appalling" policies followed by this Government.

Between 1980 and 1994, an even longer period, Britain was surpassed among OECD countries only by Switzerland in its ability to find jobs for the additional people who become eligible for work. Of those eligible for the work force, 74 per cent. have been absorbed into it—a tremendous achievement over a long period. In line with the growth forecasts to which I have alluded, that success is set to continue.

How has all this come about? I believe that three reasons can explain it. The first is that, for the first time in three decades, people can invest in this country with confidence. They know that our currency is stable. Under Labour, inflation averaged 15 per cent. and reached 29 per cent. at one point. Today, our currency is being protected. The money that people invest will not have devalued by the time their investment returns come in.

Secondly, our industrial relations have been transformed. Compared with the 29 million days lost to strike action in 1979, there were only 203 stoppages in 1993, at a time when a record number of people were in the work force. Sixty-eight per cent. of people in this country—a higher proportion than anywhere else in Europe—are in the work force. To be sure, the number of stoppages rose in 1994, but only to 205.

In short, what has changed is the fact that a climate of confrontation has been exchanged for a climate of consensus. Every company with a successful record in any market today operates by consensus—management reach down to what used to be called the workers; ideas go both ways; success is the result.

The third ingredient is investment. I was interested to hear the figures given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell). The *Wall Street Journal* did say that between 1980 and 1994 investment in this country grew two thirds faster than in Germany, and 90 per cent. more than it grew in France. We were second only to Japan in terms of increased investment. That is why productivity and competitiveness improved here, and why the gap between our economy and the French and German economies—we used to look up to them in 1979—closed.

More evidence of how the British economy has been transformed is to be found in the fact that people from abroad are prepared to put their money where their mouths are. Over the past year the west midlands has enjoyed £1.25 billion of foreign investment. That equals 11,000 jobs, 6,000 of which are new and 5,000 of which have been safeguarded. It is certainly significant that 40 per cent. of all Japanese and American investment in Europe comes to this country. Moreover, all the top 10 consumer electronics firms in Japan have recently invested significantly in the United Kingdom.

As Mr. Henkel of the German CBI recently said, over the past 14 years our "declining" British industry has managed to attract no less than nine and a half times as much inward investment as German industry has, despite the fact that the latter is supposed to lead Europe.

To any person of common sense and objectivity it is easy to see why this inward investment has come. People want to put their money where they believe they will get the best return on it, and where the labour force is flexible and skilled. The British tax burden as a proportion of GDP has fallen, from 42 per cent. It is still too high; as the Prime Minister recently said, we want to get it below 40 per cent.—and then on down to 30 per cent. The countries that keep their tax take at near 30 per cent. of GDP—Switzerland, Japan and the United States—are the most successful at creating jobs of the kind that we want for all our constituents.

Another reason is that we do not burden our companies with the sort of non-wage costs that are increasing in Europe. It is significant that, in Britain, additional labour costs are about £18 for every £100 in basic wages, but in Germany the figure is £32 and in France it is £41. Small wonder that Mr. Henkel says that in Germany:

> "We have too rigid labour laws. We have too high social costs and taxes. We work the shortest working week in Europe. The German government spends 50 per cent. of GDP as opposed to 42 per cent. in Britain. No wonder we have a problem."

The problem of a shorter working week, a minimum wage, more social costs and more taxation will be exacerbated if we have a Labour Government. That is why

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

it is nothing short of barmy for members of the German Social Democratic party and Mr. Santer, President of the European Commission, to go around Europe, supposedly on a crusade for jobs around Europe, but in reality raising social costs for already competitive businesses in Britain, which would mean that they would be less inclined to employ people and lead to job losses overall.

The failure of Mr. Santer and those party members to recognise that is symptomatic of the appalling misguidedness of the Labour party's industrial and economic policy. Having heard Mr. Henkel's comments, how anyone could suggest that Britain should load costs on to its already competitive companies through the social chapter or, more especially, the minimum wage—giving us, in industrial terms, the sclerosis virus that is undermining European competitiveness—defies belief.

If the Labour party is guilty of that, it is also guilty of the fact that it has never been able to persuade the British people—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said, it will not be able to do so at the next general election—that it can keep its hands out of the taxpayer's pocket. Its Front-Bench spokesman may try to give the impression—it is only that—of fiscal rectitude, but every time they do so, in any debate, four out of 10 Labour Back-Bench Members make speeches with specific comments on additional Government spending.

It is disappointing that a man who aspires to be Chancellor should come up—this is the sum total of his fiscal policy—merely with the gimmick of 10p on income tax, which even the Institute of Fiscal Studies said was nonsense and a gimmick, and then talk, as he did again today, about a windfall tax, the proceeds of which have been—we have counted—"spent" no less than 11 times in different pledges by different Labour Front-Bench Members. If that does not show an unwillingness to confront the difficult issues that are involved in running a responsible fiscal policy, I do not know what does.

Sheer incompetence does not come much worse, especially in the realm of economic prediction, than when the shadow Chancellor said in 1993—we should keep reminding people of this because it shows the Labour party's feel for economic forecasting, irrespective of what it says about the Chancellor—that, as the result of the Budget, unemployment would rise this month, next month, the month after and for months to come. What happened? Unemployment did precisely the opposite. In the past six months, it has fallen by an average of 17,900. It is sad that the Labour party does not appear either in the debate or wider afield to confront the realities of an increasingly competitive global world in industrial and economic terms.

The Government are right to emphasise their supply-side measures and to pursue their deregulation initiative, although I and some of my constituents are somewhat cynical that that is bearing as much fruit as it should. Only the day before yesterday, when I was out house visiting, one of my constituents, an engineering manager, told me that, as a result of some idiotic health and safety directive, he should have been undertaking stress monitoring for each employee. He said that, if he was expected to undertake stress monitoring and all his other health and safety responsibilities, he might as well shut the factory today.

I agree that, led by the Deputy Prime Minister, deregulation is extremely important, but I hope that the President of the Board of Trade will take on board the fact that people do not believe that the deregulation initiative is as effective as it should be. Business link is making contacts around the country and doing a valuable job. It should take a greater role in producing information that would allow the Government to act more effectively on that.

The Government are right to try to reduce Government expenditure. I hope that it will go below 40 per cent. of GDP. That means changes in people's attitude to the welfare state. When it was first set up in 1945, it took 4 per cent. of GDP. This country is infinitely richer now, but the welfare state is taking 12 per cent. of GDP. That cannot be justified. Any steps to rectify that position, especially given the huge amount of private savings—£600 billion—in pension funds and investment trusts, should be taken.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) that it is essential that the Government clearly say that we should not accept the straightjacket of a single currency and the regulations that are necessary for it, and that it would hamper and hidebound an increasingly competitive economy and mean that Britain may no longer be the enterprise centre of Europe. If we can split from a single currency that is unnecessary, unproductive and, happily—I hope—increasingly unrealistic, given the Government's enormously successful policies on the economy and industry in the past 16 years, we can be the enterprise centre not only of Europe, but of the world.

5.37 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am a little puzzled why we are having the debate today. On Thursday, we thought that we would be debating something else, and suddenly the Government advised us that they urgently needed to have a full day's debate on the economy on Monday. I assumed that it was because the Chancellor of the Exchequer had something new and exciting to tell us, but he did not. He made the usual speech in the usual way—entertaining as always, but adding little or nothing to the sum total of our knowledge about the state of economy and his view of where it is going.

We have had a confetti of statistics, league tables, and perhaps just the beginning of the warm-up of an election debate on the economy tested out. Hon. Members will remember that, in the United States presidential election, for people asking what the issue was, the slogan on the wall said, "It's the economy, stupid!"

I wonder whether we should rephrase that and say, "It's the stupid economy", because it never seems to do what the Government expect it to do. Most of the time, the Chancellor tells us why it will be different next time, but, as I hope to make clear, his and his predecessor's record in forecasting the economy's development and progress is extremely doubtful and inaccurate.

We all want our economy to succeed. The difference between us is on what measures will help to achieve that, what policies the Government should pursue, and what factors must be taken into account. Of course the fall in unemployment over the past 17 months is welcome, insofar as it goes. The relatively low rate of inflation is also welcome, if it is sustained and sustainable, as the foundation for long-term investment. However, neither of

those indicators is quite as good or quite as simple as the, perhaps understandable, euphoria of Ministers would have us believe.

The reality is that the Government have acknowledged that things have gone wrong, but say that things would be a great deal worse if there were a change of Government—and that, anyway, everything is about to go right, so we should trust and believe them. The Government talk about the fact—often suggesting that it is something new and startling—that there have been four years of sustainable growth, and that that is some sort of triumph. In fact, it has been a long, slow recovery from a deep and damaging recession. That is a long way short of an economic miracle. It debases language to suggest that it is a miracle.

In fact, we are talking about annualised growth of about 2 per cent., which is below the average of the past 25 years. I accept that it appears to be sustainable, but it is slow by international standards and measured against what we need to do if we are to get our output ahead of our productivity, so that we can create the jobs we need to bring about the economic success we all want.

One thing we might have expected from the Chancellor today, although I know that it is not the form, was a hint about a drop in interest rates. All the commentators tell us that that is likely later in the week. Perhaps today's debate is the scene setting to enable the Chancellor to say, "I told you on Monday that things were going well. We have cut interest rates again, and that proves it."

In fact, if interest rates are cut later this week, it will be not because of the strength of the economy, but because of its weakness. It is growing so slowly that there is not only room for a further cut, but a desperate feeling that something needs to be done if there is to be any hope of meeting the Chancellor's 3 per cent. growth forecast. The right hon. and learned Gentleman must be the only person in the land who believes that he can hit 3 per cent. growth this year—and he reiterated that belief today.

Let us examine where the economy is at the moment. Manufacturing output is actually lower than it was a year ago. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) said that manufacturing was no longer as important as it used to be, and that it is now all about tradeable goods and services. That debate is old hat. The economy is infinitely diverse, and infinitely varied.

Of course tradeable goods and services generate wealth and are valuable, and they need to be supported, but the fundamental fact is that, unless we also create a stronger manufacturing base, the total size of the British economy will not be sufficient to generate the long-term performance we need.

Mr. Sheerman: I substantially agree with the hon. Gentleman, but is not it a fact that the percentage change we need to increase the size of the service and miscellaneous sector is enormous? We would have to take in the Tokyo and New York exchanges and much else. In contrast, just a relatively small increase in manufacturing could solve Britain's economic problems.

Mr. Bruce: That is a fair point, but I am not sure that I want to go down that route. We have dramatically expanded the service sector, so the scope for a much bigger share is limited. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, without a much more successful and innovative manufacturing base, total wealth and total employment will not be sufficient to sustain us in the manner to which all parties would like this country to become accustomed and to feel good and confident about.

Investment in manufacturing, as a percentage of gross domestic product, is now the lowest on record. Indeed, manufacturing investment fell by 9 per cent. in the last quarter of last year. The point is that it is not a matter of not expanding our manufacturing base fast enough; it is still contracting. That is serious, as I hope the President of the Board of Trade will acknowledge tonight. Indeed, I hope that he will remember that he is the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, not just President of the Board of Trade. I hope that he will give some recognition of what can be done.

I was amused, as were others, by the article on the front page of today's *Financial Times*, under the headline "Heseltine to defend UK investment record". The Deputy Prime Minister was basically saying that industrial changes mean that manufacturers can now produce more goods with less spending and therefore the fall in investment is not a matter for great public concern or anxiety. However, the article states:

"Mr. Sudhir Junankar, associate director of economics at the Confederation of British Industry, believes that, while changes in organisation might be having an impact on investment patterns, the general weakness in capital spending is a 'worrying' factor, inhibiting recovery."

Obviously, the Deputy Prime Minister did not get the Government off the hook. The reality is that we need a high-tech, expanding manufacturing sector.

The current position is of a Budget and an economic strategy based on achieving a growth forecast that none of the current indicators suggests is at all realistic. There was an article in *The Observer* yesterday by Maurice Fitzpatrick, who also wrote a letter to the *Financial Times* in January in which he set out—it still stands—that,

"to achieve 3 per cent. growth in 1996, the economy would have to accelerate sharply. One would be looking, by way of example, for growth of .6 per cent. in the first quarter, .9 per cent. in the second quarter and 1.5 per cent. in each of the two final quarters. That seems unlikely, particularly given the problems that are being faced elsewhere. It may well be only a matter of time before the Treasury downsizes its 1996 growth forecast."

That will have serious consequences for the Government's electoral strategy, let alone Britain's economic success. That is possibly a reason for going for an early election—before it becomes apparent that the Government's forecasts are unachievable, and that the position is in fact much less optimistic than the Chancellor's speech suggested.

The other matter about which the Government have expressed considerable satisfaction is the low rate of inflation. More than once, the Prime Minister has said, "We have got inflation in the box, we have locked it up, and we have thrown away the key." Apart from being a rather complacent comment, it does not square with the reality.

The first question is, what has delivered low inflation? Has it been the successful implementation of Government policies, monetary strategy, or fiscal management? Or is it not simply the fact that there has been a deep recession, in which, generally speaking, prices and price increases have been low throughout the world?

The reality is that, far from having an extremely good performance on inflation, Britain is at the bottom of the European league. Only Greece, Italy and Spain have a

[Mr. Bruce]

worse performance. The Chancellor's bullish remarks not only about his belief in a single European currency but about his determination to ensure that Britain can meet the criteria seemed to be very much off target.

On the latest analysis published last week by the Commission, taking either the national figures or the Commission's estimates for inflation, Britain does not look as though it will be able to meet the inflation criteria and qualify for EMU in 1997. If it is to qualify, it is crucial that the Chancellor gets inflation down to 2.5 per cent. and keeps it there, because that is the top end of the range that would enable Britain to meet the inflation criteria.

I believe that one reason why investment is low in Britain is that there is no deep and abiding confidence among investors that low inflation and interest rates and stable exchange rates are here to stay. They have had their fingers burned too often, and there is nothing to suggest that the encouraging trends will continue, or that the Government have any real control over them. People think that, with any external pressure, the whole cycle could be triggered off again.

That problem is exacerbated by the fact that the Chancellor shows signs of a weakening resolve. I have on a number of occasions praised him for standing his ground in the face of pressure from his party, and ensuring that he does not do the populist thing and knock the economy and then economic recovery off course. As the election draws closer, however, he has shown signs of acceding to that pressure.

The Chancellor has also—he cited it himself—reduced interest rates, with the possibility of a further reduction. Tax cuts are coming through which his own criteria do not justify, and the building society giveaways are also coming into the system. There is a danger that that could create a stimulus in the economy for which there is no buffer mechanism, which could stoke up inflation again. There is no real mechanism to turn the situation around. There is anxiety about whether the Chancellor has the bottle to stick to the policy under pressure from his party.

I intervened on the Chancellor about borrowing and tax cuts, which I am sure are not a source of great comfort to Conservative Members. I am astonished by the way in which Ministers suggest that they are getting borrowing under control and are confident that borrowing is coming down, when the overshoot on their forecast is approaching 50 per cent. Borrowing is clearly out of control.

I have grave doubts about how firmly the Chancellor is committed to reducing borrowing. I quoted what he said to David Frost in September 1994, but he did not seem to believe that I was quoting him word for word. He said that a public sector borrowing requirement of more than £30 billion made tax cuts impossible. He continued:

"£30 billion is not the basis for cutting taxes and would actually worry all those people out there . . . if they thought I was going to start tax cutting on the back of even a £30 billion public sector requirement."

All the indications are that the outturn in the current year is likely to exceed £30 billion, so what is the Chancellor going to do about it? His good intentions go only so far, and when the chips are down, he runs into the buffers of political opportunism.

Unemployment has come down, and that is welcome. The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) said that, in his constituency, 1,400 people have found jobs. That is of course good news, but let us be realistic. We are being told that we should be pleased that unemployment has risen from 1.3 million in 1979 to 2.2 million today. The figures may have gone up and then down, but that is a net increase of almost 1 million.

To take a shorter cycle, since 1990, when the Prime Minister took over from Lady Thatcher, the number of unemployed people has risen by 540,000. The Government are still complacent about unemployment, but the problem is more than just a lack of concern for those people. The President of the Board of Trade said in an intervention that many people were going through the cycle of being unemployed and getting back into work fairly quickly, and that there are not too many people who suffer long-term employment. That is not a good enough way in which to dismiss the problem, because it is costing us billions of pounds.

The amount of taxpayers' money that is being wasted on unemployment is the fundamental reason why taxes cannot be brought down, and education and health are starved of funds. Unemployment during the Government's period of office has cost about £150 billion in lost taxes and the payment of benefits. That is more than all the receipts during that period from North sea oil and privatisation.

All that windfall, that unpredicted gain, has been dissipated in paying for the costs of unemployment. The debate about the 43 per cent. of taxation as a percentage of GDP is therefore sterile unless the Government can come up with some way in which to deal with unemployment. The Chancellor is taxing the British taxpayer just as heavily as Denis Healey did, because he has failed to tackle the underlying weakness in the economy.

Although there is some welcome recovery and some dynamic in the British economy, we are a long way from an economic miracle that will generate a feel-good factor, security in employment, confidence to invest, and the sort of growth rate that could conceivably enable us to reduce taxes and maintain public services where people want them to be. Unless that can be achieved, the argument about cutting taxes is also about cutting services, or at least forcing people to pay for more of their education and health care straight out of their own pockets.

We need a more long-term vision in economic policy, which is why Liberal Democrats believe that we should have an operationally independent central bank. That bank, tied into a single currency—I agree with the Chancellor—if it were achievable, would enable sustained lower interest rates year on year than those we could manage to achieve on our own.

We need to review the rules on public sector borrowing so that we can distinguish between capital and current borrowing. The trouble is that, in order to try to meet their borrowing targets, the Government are cutting capital borrowing rather than current borrowing, which is damaging the underlying strength of the economy.

We need to invest fundamentally in education and training. That is the single reason why Liberal Democrats voted against the 1p reduction in income tax. We believed that such a cut could not be achieved in the present climate. We also need to alter the balance of taxation and spending to deal with environmental issues—taxes on pollution rather than employment and wealth creation:

a switch from motorway investment to public transport investment and to the reinvigoration of our ailing infrastructure.

All those fundamental changes are necessary for the beginning of what would be an economic miracle: the ability to secure high levels of employment in high-skill, high-earning jobs that would enable people to have a good quality of life, pay a reasonable level of taxes and have good-quality public services. The spending round in the past two years has shown that that cannot be delivered by the Government, because they have not created a climate for sustained and sustainable, low-inflation, investment-led recovery. Until they show that they can do so, this country will not succeed.

I was left lacking any enlightenment on either of the two major parties' position on the single currency. The Chancellor of the Exchequer appeared to hold out against a commitment to any possible referendum in the Conservative manifesto. The shadow Chancellor took the same view, seeming to say that somehow the issue would be left to the election, and that there might or might not be a single currency. One cannot put a cigarette paper between the two parties on the issue.

The one thing that Liberal Democrats are consistent about is that we believe that it is in Britain's interest not only for there to be a single currency, but for us to be there at the beginning of it and to shape it. We accept that the decision is difficult, especially at the present time. That is why it is also important to take the people with us.

We should show leadership and vision, and recognise that, in the long term, the prize that can be won through a strong European economy with a strong currency that removes the current frictions is well worth winning, and will enable Europe to compete much more effectively in an increasingly global market. That prize is worth winning, and the Liberal Democrats represent the only party in this country with that vision, which they are prepared to follow through.

5.58 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this debate which, unfortunately for those who lay claim to parliamentary supremacy in these matters, is rather a sad example. With a vote on a three-line Whip at the end of our debate, we are discussing the central area of politics—the management of the economy by Government, in so far as Governments have much purchase on those matters these days. We see clearly the extent to which the House has more pressing things to do. It is sad: I note that fact in passing.

I was fortunate enough to hear the opening speeches by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). My right hon. and learned Friend set out clearly and persuasively some of the ways in which this Government, under successive Chancellors, have pursued responsible policies, which have made an important positive difference to the way in which the economy performs.

However, I do not think that one should exaggerate that point any more because the theme of my intervention will be that national Governments and national authorities are a great deal less powerful these days than some people in the House and the country fondly believe. It is about time that we politicians were more honest with the general public in our assessment of these matters, so that expectations did not run ahead of what can reasonably be offered.

The Opposition amendment is a fairly clear example of Labour's recent habit of being long on new Labour words, but rather short on substantial explanation about how Labour would put those words into effect if it came to office. When the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was challenged on those points by several of my hon. Friends, both from the Back Benches and from the Front Bench, he was not very forthcoming. Yet we have been there before. We have had that experience when intervening during the hon. Gentleman's speeches, so today was nothing new, I am sorry to say.

It is noticeable in the Labour amendment, for example, that there are some plausible and worthy words about regretting

"the widespread job insecurity throughout Britain".

That is right. All of us know from our constituencies the extent to which a range of people who never expected to experience job insecurity now feel it in their lives. The important point, which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East missed—I wanted to intervene, but he felt unable to give way—is that job insecurity affects those who are now in jobs and who had always assumed that they would be in jobs until their retirement.

The hon. Member tried to answer the Chancellor's point about the community action programme, and he spoke about the various worthy measures that Governments have introduced from time to time to try to help the long-term unemployed back into work. That is, of course, important, but the hon. Gentleman wilfully missed the point. The aspect that should be addressed by Labour Front-Bench Members—I have yet to hear them do so—is how they would stand against the new global developments which are bringing the forces of competition and insecurity into play for a much wider range of people than was previously the case.

I suspect that the only nostrum that Labour would have in its locker if it got into office would be the old Labour policies of protectionism in one guise or another, which would breed a false sense of security in the minds of the electorate. I await with interest the winding-up speech, if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). I shall look for some flesh on the bones. Failing that, it is incumbent on Labour to explain what it would seek to do to allay the central psychological and political problem of our time.

As I have said, the time has come for both sides in our economic debate to level with the British people, much more than we have felt able to do hitherto, about the new realities of the global economy, and to draw out some of the policy implications of those realities. I shall spend a few moments touching on some of those realities, because I am not sure how widely understood they are.

I remind you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the United Kingdom has about 1 per cent. of the world's population, but 3.5 per cent. of world gross domestic product. It could be said that we punch above our weight already. The proportion of gross national product that is internationally traded has risen from 20 per cent. for exports and 27 per cent. for imports in 1979 to 23 per cent. and 25 per cent. respectively in 1994, which is the last full year for which I have figures.

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

The export of goods and services, at constant 1990 prices, has risen from 22 per cent. of GDP in 1979 to 27 per cent. in 1994. Capital flows in and out of the United Kingdom, about which much was made earlier in the debate, have grown as a percentage of GDP, from 1 per cent. for inflows and 3 per cent. for outflows in 1978, before we lifted exchange controls, which is the relevant benchmark, to 5 per cent. for inflows and 6 per cent. for outflows in 1994, the latest full year for which figures are available.

Investment income from abroad is important to those who worry about foreigners owning our industry. It is just as important to bear in mind the other side of the account, which is the extent to which we earn from wealth-generating assets elsewhere in the world. That process will not diminish, but will increase with the passage of time.

Our investment income from abroad has increased from 9 per cent. of GDP in 1979 to 12 per cent. in 1994, the latest full year for which figures are available. The value of our external assets, which generate some of that wealth, has grown from £72 billion in 1979, producing about £8 billion of foreign income, to £1,405 billion in 1994, producing £78 billion of foreign income. Again, the trend is obvious.

The importance of financial services, which help to generate wealth for the United Kingdom, hardly needs stating. Financial services produce £20 billion of net earnings every year for this country, and are responsible for 13 per cent. of total UK employment. That is a dramatic increase compared with the figures for 10 or 20 years ago. The whole House is well aware of the extent to which we attract the lion's share of foreign direct investment in the European Union from third countries, notably the United States, Japan and the so-called Asian tigers.

I have taken the trouble, in what is not an overcrowded debate, to weary you, Madam Deputy Speaker, with those factual points, because it is important to put them on record. People in the media may not be listening to our debate, but they may at least read our remarks in future, and take account of the way in which the world has changed, and the implications of that. I will highlight three implications which seem obvious to me and which should be obvious to hon. Members on both Front Benches if they are paying attention to what is going on in the world.

The first implication is that monetary policy now has to be conducted in a different framework. It must be used to validate market expectations rather than heroically to attempt to lead or resist market movements and market expectations. If it tries the latter, it will, as sure as eggs are eggs, end in tears, to mix metaphors.

Foreign exchange flows are now 10 times world GDP and 50 times world trade. A group of nations may try concerted intervention, with concerted interest rate movements. However, there are severe limitations on the real autonomy and the real capacity for action of any national monetary authority. We might as well recognise that, and it might as well be our starting point for monetary policy.

The second policy implication is that fiscal policy needs to err on the side of prudence to earn the confidence of the financial markets. There have been many examples in the past 10 or 20 years of the way in which fiscal fecklessness is punished swiftly.

The two obvious examples are the Labour Government's experience from 1974 to 1976 and the Mitterrand Government's experience from 1981 to 1983. In each case, a socialist or left-inclined Government sought to make a dash for growth, thought they could defy the laws of international economic gravity, and then suffered grievous consequences. Under the Labour Government, we had some of the largest and most dramatic cuts in public expenditure in any one year of the post-war period. In France, there was a total U-turn and a reversal of policy.

Given that both monetary and fiscal policies are severely constrained by those facts—they are not fiction—one is driven ineluctably to put much greater weight, quite rightly, on microeconomic and supply side policies. That is the new area in which Governments can make a difference, and if only one point in my speech lodges in the minds of my right hon. and hon. Friends tonight, I hope it will be that.

The approach to supply side policy must be broadly and imaginatively defined. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) was right to talk about investment in physical capital and in public and private infrastructure, and investment in human capital is at the core of the areas of consensus between the Government and the Opposition. Such investment is important—the fact that we happen to agree on it makes it no less so—and it must be sustained for a long period to bear fruit.

The phrase "supply side policy" must be defined more broadly. In this, we can learn from the continent, where they know that, in a world of highly mobile capital and high net worth individuals, one must attract to one's shores, and then retain, people who could easily take their energy, efforts and wealth-creating abilities elsewhere. France recognised long ago that, to sustain the growth points in various parts of the country—Montpelier, Nancy, Grenoble and Rennes, to name a few—investment in higher education and even in culture was needed to make those centres more attractive to the people who wanted to invest and lead their lives there.

On supply side policies, one must look across the spectrum of government. It is not just a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry, although that Department is obviously important. It is not just a matter of deregulation, although that must constantly be carried out—particularly when it is borne in mind that Brussels may attempt to gold-plate regulations.

I believe that, if my right hon. and hon. Friends were to pay the greatest attention to supply side policies during the remainder of this Parliament and the whole of the next—during which I confidently expect that we will still be in government—it would greatly benefit our people. It would put more people back to work and generate the wealth that would allow us to finance the public services—something we all want.

6.11 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The powerful oration of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on supply side economics and much else could have been his curtain-raiser before joining us on the Opposition Benches. The only part of his speech that rang a little hollow was his mock confidence that he will still sit on the Government Benches after the next election.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, too often in the House, we make speeches of the yah-boo variety, and even the best speeches contain an element of that to

maintain one's party and political credibility. When we accept the global dimensions of our problems, however, there is some convergence of party policy—although we do not like to admit that in public too often. It does us harm as Members to pretend that the Opposition are totally opposed to everything that the Government do and that the Government are opposed to every policy initiative that we take, and part of my speech will be on that theme. I intend to refer to a mixture of matters, some of which the hon. Gentleman might agree with, and others—some good party political stuff—that am I sure he will not.

There is no better example of our oppositionist debates in the House than our debates on the economy. That is not surprising, because the Government's handling of the economy is at the heart of our responsibilities as politicians. Our wealth-creating capacity and ability as a nation, both now and in the future, are central to our welfare. We must understand not only the present, but how economic policies have developed in this century—particularly in the modern era, post-1945.

It is our duty also to scrutinise the present and to see how current policies are affecting the lives of our constituents. But we would be dishonest if we did not also look at the way in which the economy might develop in the next 20 to 25 years. As politicians and Members of Parliament, we must look forward to 2020 and 2025 and try to see how wealth will be created in this country and how our constituents, and their children and grandchildren, will earn a living. That is our duty—to look at the past and learn lessons, fearlessly to scrutinise the present and to look carefully at how we can plan for the future.

Lord Healey, when he was Chancellor, said that the British economy was

"like a supertanker—it takes an awfully long time to turn it."

That supertanker is on a much longer journey, on a much broader ocean, than my noble Friend realised when he made that statement, and it will take any incoming Labour Government a long time to reposition that supertanker and rechart its direction. We shall inherit the Government's policies of the past 16 years, and it will take some time to eliminate the poorer polices and modify those that we find acceptable.

We deceive our constituents and delude ourselves by pretending that there are fundamental differences between the parties when, in truth, there is sometimes a convergence of policy. Of the three major aspects of policy of the post-war Labour Government, the one dealing with the economy—promoting full employment and influenced by Keynesianism—was borrowed from the Liberals; Keynes was a noted Liberal, as we all know. Although Labour built the notion of a health service that was free and open to all, the welfare state policy was based on the Beveridge report—Beveridge was another Liberal. We could say ruefully that the only one of the three policies that genuinely came from Labour was that on public ownership, which came from Morrison. I leave the House to judge which of the policies Labour was most successful in pursuing. I shall come back to that subject in a moment.

We have heard much today about the performance of the British economy in terms of international rankings, and I do not want to be one of those saying that we have slipped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league—enough hon. Members have done so, and there is sufficent evidence that there are worrying aspects of our economy's recent performance. The Chancellor of the Exchequer speaks as if the Government were responsible only for the past three or four years and, within that period, had no real responsibility for the worst recession that this country has had for 50 years. That was all part of the past; something for which the Government were not responsible.

Conservative Members display a strange logic when speaking on the subject. They all know that the British economy led the European economy into recession, but Minister after Minister—and many central office-fuelled Back Benchers—now says, "Aren't we doing well? The German economy is going down the tubes, the French economy is in trouble and the Spanish are struggling." Do they not realise that those countries are not only our competitors but our main customers? If they are heading for another recession. We may follow them into recession this time, and we shall all end up the poorer. I do not understand that logic. We are all in the economy together. I thought that Europe was about helping each other, trying to make sure that all our economies are supportive of each other—albeit in a competitive framework—and that we all survive better, as a wealthier part of the globe, as a consequence. That was why I was disappointed with the Chancellor's speech, which never aimed to get beneath the surface of the argument.

To everyone's surprise, the Government asked for this debate on the economy. In a major debate on the economy, it is not good enough for the Chancellor's speech to be a big puff for the latest chairman of the Conservative party's ambition to get a feel-good factor going. We all know that the Chancellor came to the House to proclaim that very soon, we shall never have had it so good. It was a long but not a thoughtful speech. I have heard him make good speeches, but today's was superficial, dwelt on the surface of things and will give his reputation little lustre.

To return to our responsibilities for scrutinising the economy, after a cool and serious appraisal of the past, present and future, the next step is to find ways of tackling our weaknesses and building on our strengths. We heard little of that from the Government. The way to do it is by spreading best practice and learning from our best competitors, wherever they are in the world. We cannot consider only one model, such as that which was always rammed down our throats when people said that we would never be as good as the Germans and that we must copy them or the Swedes. We must always seek the very best practices.

The competitive edge in the world has shifted from Europe to other countries; it has remained to a remarkable degree in the United States, which is still a very competitive, active and efficient economy. In the fashion for looking at the little tigers, the big tiger and other best practice, we sometimes neglect the economy across the Atlantic, which, by all criteria, is still doing pretty well. It is not without problems, but no economy is without those.

There is no excuse for not tackling the inability of our manufacturing industry to do better. I intervened on the Chancellor in the most worrying part of his speech, when he glossed over the period under Baroness Thatcher, when we lost so much of our manufacturing capacity. In analysing what we have to do now—not dwelling in the past, but asking how we get it right—one of the problems

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

for any politician is tackling the base from which we have to work. How big is our manufacturing sector? It is perilously close to, or just under, 20 per cent.—one fifth of our gross domestic product.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting and thoughtful speech. He told us to look across the Atlantic. It is wise not to forget that great economy and its success, but its proportion of manufacturing is comparable with ours. What lesson does he draw from that?

Mr. Sheerman: The United States economy is very different from ours. Many commentators would say that we must consider the whole of north America rather than only the United States. I would lump Mexico and Canada in with the United States if I were making such a comparison. The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point.

Let us dwell on the other problem with getting our manufacturing capacity right. From all the comparisons with our competitors, it is clear that we do not have not enough medium-sized companies. There was a period in the 1980s when many more small enterprises were starting. Worryingly, few of them—not nearly enough—grew into more substantial enterprises. Some of our competitors, such as Germany, have had a capacity to grow small companies into medium-sized ones and some of those into large ones. It is a question not only of a critical mass but of the quality of the critical mass. That is also an answer to the point made by the Chief Secretary. It is the nature as well as the size of the critical mass that counts.

I invite the Chief Secretary to come to the parts of the country, such as that which I represent in West Yorkshire, the west midlands or parts of Scotland, where manufacturing industry is still alive and well in one sense. He should talk to manufacturers who believe that if, for example, the engineering industry in the west midlands or West Yorkshire goes down any further, the critical mass will be below that which is necessary to be able to compete internationally. It will no longer be possible to set up firms in those regions with the confidence that is given by the supply chains and supply relationships that make businesses viable and competitive.

The inability to move nimbly from our industrial base has inhibited our industrial situation over the past few years. I direct Ministers to the important problem—which was picked up well in Hamish McRae's recent book "The World in 2020"—of Britain's inability nimbly to move to new skills. The Chancellor did not deal with our inability to create and maintain a highly skilled work force that is competitive at every level with other countries.

We must prepare ourselves for the new structures and ways of working. We have all seen the literature on that problem. More and more enterprises are moving from hierarchical structures, with bosses at the top sending commands down a long chain, to working as teams with many more technically and scientifically qualified workers. Most experts suggest that we are ill-equipped to deal with that. Only last week, a group of hon. Members heard John Neill from Unipart talking about how he started running his enterprise in Oxford, which both the Chief Secretary and my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) may know, with people with poor skills. Only by imaginative enterprise and management was he able to change dramatically the nature of those skills. Unipart is one of the few companies in this country that has reached such a level.

Time and again, we get our education priorities wrong and run education policies wrongly. After 17 years of Conservative government, we are still unable to deliver by the age of 16 competently trained and educated young people. The truth is that many of our schools fail our young people. If we fail to educate people before the age of 16, how much more expensive is it to repair the damage post-16? The priority must be to invest in our schools and high-quality teachers, and work with the profession as part of a team rather than as an alienated minority.

Secondly, there has been an amazing change in the further education sector. I was talking recently to the head of my local technical college, who explained that, under the new regime of funding from the Further Education Funding Council, the courses that are being threatened with funding cuts are the day release courses, those for training highly skilled people, the courses that used to supplement apprenticeships and the new apprenticeships to supplement so much of the skilled work force in engineering and many other industries. In the further education sector, the old technical colleges are the institutions that are most in danger.

We heard not one word from the Chancellor about how our universities can transform the British economy. I am one who believes that we are not nearly achieving our full potential—we are using only about 40 per cent. of the potential of higher education—and the full potential of the 100-plus universities to transform the regional economies and our national economy. At a time when we need that university input so much, we have hardly touched that potential.

Look at the successes of Professor Bhaticharia and the initiatives at Warwick, and at what has happened in Salford, as well as at the older universities such as Cambridge. Best practice shows how, in partnership with their local communities and with an entrepreneurial spirit, the universities can transform the British economy. In terms of knowledge-led innovation, the universities will be the secret of so much of our success. Our international competitors know that, so why have the Government consistently cut funding to higher education, which impacts on the quality of the work there?

To give a reasonably balanced view, I must admit that I welcome the fact that about 30 per cent. of the population now goes to university—when I and many other hon. Members went, the figure was only 3 per cent. That increase must be applauded, and I shall not gainsay that. Underlying that improvement, however, staff-student ratios, investment in equipment and buildings and the pay of the people whom we ask to teach and to do research in our universities are at such a poor level as to have a worrying effect on the future quality and effort of the sector.

How could the Chancellor not have alluded to that problem, when his Budget sliced another 7 per cent. off our university sector? I sympathised greatly with the vice-chancellors when they said that a capitation of £300 per student was the only response. Hon. Members on both sides of the House had better come to terms with

the fact that we must get the funding of higher education right. I know that the Opposition are working on it and trying to get it right. I must tell the Opposition Front Bench—I shall say it again in other circumstances—that we must make some pretty unpleasant decisions in the education funding world to get it right.

All the evidence shows that those who go through higher education get all the best things in life—they get more training once they have their degree, as well as a higher quality of life and higher salaries. If I were in charge—I am not, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I would put the money in at the other end, especially into skills training for the 14 to 19-year-olds. That is the age that seems to be so crucial to our performance as an economy.

Finally, I must mention the notion of a stakeholding economy—a concept that is dear to my heart, but which raises some interesting responses from Conservative Members every time I mention it. The Chancellor referred to that notion in passing and seemed to deride it, which seems strange when one considers its history. One does not have to go that far back—not back to the diggers and the levellers, who did talk about stakeholding in a very real way.

I was trying to track down where the notion came from. I thought that it was from the khaki election, just after the first world war, when Lloyd George, I think, said that three acres and a cow was every man's right—it was every man's right to have a stake in his country—which was stakeholding with a vengeance. I understand from the Library, however, that it goes back to 1885 and beyond, so it was not vintage Lloyd George.

In recent years, the concept of stakeholding has come, not from politicians, but from the corporate sector—from companies, managers and the heads of the most successful international corporations. It comes from people who say and have been saying for many years that, unless we have stakeholders in this enterprise, we shall not be able to compete with the international competition—the very best in the world—as we shall not be using the full potential of all our employees, including the employees of our suppliers, and of the other stakeholders.

Basically, there are five participants in the process. They are the employees, the managers, the shareholders, the supplying companies—the supply chain, which is made up of those who supply the larger companies, which then go on to supply someone else, is much underrated in this country—and the local community. All are important. Working together, they can assure the real efficiency of a company and an economy.

What is wrong with the Leader of the Opposition using a concept intelligently and realising that, just as we cannot have an internationally competitive company without stakeholding, we cannot have an internationally competitive country without it? Stakeholding makes us corporately and competitively efficient as an economy, but it also makes us efficient in terms of delivering the good things in life to our constituents and citizens. Surely it is worth exploring and working on that concept, and understanding it better. That is worth saying, and valuable.

What is wrong? Is it that the Prime Minister did not say it first? Is it that someone in Conservative central office or at No. 10 has been working on stakeholding for a long time and that, suddenly, the rug was pulled from under him? I suspect so because, on the one hand, the Prime Minister says that it is a ridiculous notion, but on the other, he seems to applaud it. One never knows where he is coming from.

We had hardly got into the debate when there was some to-ing and fro-ing on the subject of Europe. Primarily, it was a debate within the Conservative party, rather than between the Government and the Opposition—our debates on Europe were sorted out a long time ago. That debate seems be continuing fervently and at a pretty high temperature among Conservative Members.

Let me make one final plea. Any discussion of the economy must include Europe. Many of us support Europe because we believe that it will benefit our constituents and Britain's economic health. We care about Europe, so we are often painted into a corner. However, the fact that we are positive about Europe does not mean that we applaud everything about it. Those of us who are pro-European are often called upon to defend the iniquitous common agricultural policy and the ghastly way in which Europe is executive-driven, with no proper legislative check by domestic national Parliaments or the European Parliament. Those deficiencies must be addressed.

I was encouraged by the Confederation of British Industry calling for an intelligent, rational dialogue in Europe, which, according to the director general, should be based on

"logic and facts rather than emotion and slogans".

According to press reports, the CBI seems to be fed up with the Conservative party in terms of emotion and slogans about the European Union. I hope that the CBI will look at the logic and facts and not just at the emotions and slogans surrounding the social chapter. Many members of the CBI have not scrutinised the social chapter or its implications.

The future of Europe will change our economy, whether or not we debate endlessly European monetary union. In the run-up to the intergovernmental conference, we must raise the level of the debate, learn from the CBI and begin a rational, pragmatic debate about whether EMU will assist the European economies, and our economy in particular, and whether we shall benefit from the changes that will be discussed at the IGC. We need to talk about the facts, not the myths of European membership. I end my remarks with the faint and vague hope that we can have a positive debate on Europe.

6.41 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): It is always good to follow the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). It is a little known fact that he taught me politics at Swansea university. His influence is demonstrated by the fact that I am standing here and he is sitting over there. It is good to be here after an excellent weekend, in which the socialists were kicked out of Australia and Spain. As I cannot believe that the good people of Australia and Spain are more intelligent than the good people of Britain, no doubt that trend will continue here after the next election.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said in his excellent speech, it is a shame that so few Members are here for today's important debate. It represents a useful opportunity to reflect on the Government's policies and—if we can

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wrestle them from Opposition Members—those of the Opposition to ensure that Britain continues on the successful route that it has followed for the past 16 years.

The debate gives me the opportunity to dwell on the fact that we have experienced 15 consecutive quarters of growth. We are selling more abroad than ever before and we export more per head than Japan. Who would have envisaged that 15 or 16 years ago? Inward investment in Britain was a record in 1994-95, with 434 new projects creating some 36,000 new jobs and securing more than 51,000 existing jobs. Britain attracts 40 per cent. of investment from the United States and Japan. We are second only to the United States as a beneficiary of inward investment.

I find it difficult to understand the xenophobic approach of those who say that it is dreadful that foreign companies have bought into British industry. I do not consider that to be a problem, so long as there is free interchange between industries. If British investors can invest abroad, it is only right that foreign investors should be able to invest in Britain.

I should also mention the standard of living in Britain. A married couple on average earnings with two children have seen their income and quality of life increase by more than 40 per cent. in real terms since 1979. It is the Government's stated aim to double the living standards of people in Britain in the next 25 years. Our policy is not boom and bust, but sustained economic development that will benefit everyone.

We need to develop policies that will help British businesses. The Opposition are not content that the red flag should fly above Parliament and the House of Commons; they also want it flying above Buckingham palace. The Leader of the Opposition should get a grip on some of his colleagues and tell them to start concentrating on the issues that concern the British people and the policies that they want, which certainly do not involve the abolition of the monarchy. He should tell his red rebels to concentrate on the issues that the Government are confronting.

We need to consider how we can help our businesses, particularly small businesses. I am vice chairman of the Small Business Bureau. More than 345,000 new businesses were created in the last nine months of 1995. They look to the Government to cut red tape so that bureaucracy—whether it is from Europe, Whitehall or the town hall—is restricted to that which is necessary, and to ensure that Britain remains as competitive as possible. We are competing not only with the rest of Europe, but with the Asian tiger economies, which are expanding significantly and which we ignore at our peril. We must ensure that Britain is economically viable and can compete with those new, strong economies.

I am extremely interested in deregulation and I was on the Standing Committee that considered the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. Those in industry who are following the debate or who will avidly read *Hansard* tomorrow and may be aware of any rules or regulations that they believe are not essential or are hampering their businesses should bring them to the notice of the Department of Trade and Industry so that, if possible, they can be scrapped. The last thing that businesses want is on-costs produced by rules and regulations that are of no benefit to employees or customers. We should scrap unnecessary rules and regulations as quickly as possible.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): Give what the hon. Gentleman has just said, does he agree tha the Government should take another look at the busines rate, particularly its effect on the small shopkeeper?

Mr. Evans: I remember not so long ago, when we ha not the unified business rate but the old rating system I was a county councillor and business men used to troo into West Glamorgan county council offices and plea with councillors to restrain their spending so that cost would not be heaped on businesses that operated on tigh margins. As it was a good, socialist-run county council the councillors listened carefully and ignored them. U went the costs and the businesses were penalised. Th unified business rate is a massive improvement on the ol rates. At least businesses can now predict their rate instead of being at the whim and pleasure of socialis local authorities.

So that our businesses remain competitive, we need t ensure that inflation remains low. We have heard muc about inflation today. It is easy to forget past inflatio levels, but I shall say more about that later. We welcom the fact that inflation is approaching 2.8 per cent. and tha it has been at a sustainable level for so long. We nee competitive, low interest rates and they are now runnin at 6.25 per cent. The 0.25 per cent cut on 18 January wa extremely welcome and I look forward to further cut when possible. That will help businesses, particularl those that must borrow money to reinvest in thei companies to remain competitive.

There is a knock-on effect also on mortgage rates. Th Chancellor mentioned the families who have benefited t the tune of £150 per month since 1990. Much of tha money will find its way back into the economy. Low competitive interest rates coupled with low mortgage rate will boost the country's economy.

Inheritance tax reform was vital to allow small famil businesses to retain money to spend as they choose. Th threshold for inheritance tax was increased from £154,00 to £200,000 in the Budget and I hope that the tax wi soon be scrapped completely. Families have enough t contend with when they lose someone near and dear t them without the added misery of inheritance tax. I hop that capital gains tax will be re-examined too.

Strikes are an important aspect of business welfare, an they are now at their lowest level in more than 100 years That is extremely welcome. Low income tax is also vita A new rate of 20 per cent. has been introduced and th higher rate of income tax has been reduced from 83 pe cent. to 40 per cent. Some hon. Members may remembe when income tax was 83 per cent. and 98 per cent. o annual income: we must never forget those days.

Corporation tax has been reduced from 52 per cent. t 33 per cent. It has decreased from 40 per cent. to 25 pe cent. for smaller companies—and it will drop further t 24 per cent. later this year. Those moves are ver welcome. When the Chancellor announced th 1p reduction in the basic rate of income tax, th Liberals—none of whom is in the Chamber—vote against that measure and Labour Members sat on thei hands, as they do on many issues these days. We mus reduce income tax to the lowest level possible and allo people to retain and to spend their own money.

The Government's stated intention is to reduc expenditure to below 40 per cent. of gross domesti product. That aim must not be confused with reducin

expenditure on essential services, because that will not occur. That expenditure will be met by examining present expenditure patterns and through economic growth. This year's Budget announced increased expenditure for education of £878 million and for health of £1.3 billion.

The Government announced that 5,000 extra police officers will be on the beat and that 10,000 closed circuit television cameras will be installed. We are spending money on essential services while cutting, as a result of growth, the amount that we spend as a percentage of GDP. We must create the conditions that allow businesses to flourish and to expand. Industry must be able to invest confidently in the British economy, sure in the knowledge of seeing a return on that investment.

Businesses must be extremely worried about the threat posed by a future Labour Government. I shall refer to some important issues on which we are not receiving straight answers from the Opposition. The first is the social chapter and the on-costs and extra bureaucracy that businesses would have to bear if we signed up to it. We read in the newspapers that the Labour party is rethinking some of the clauses in the social chapter. Labour Members may like to comment on that during the debate. Is Labour prepared to sign up to everything in the social chapter? I get the impression that the Opposition are so wedded to everything that comes out of Brussels these days that they are prepared to sign the social chapter to make it look as though they are very communautaire.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Perhaps my hon. Friend heard the interview with the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) on the radio this afternoon, in which he said that the social chapter is about terms and conditions of work. However, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) says that the social chapter contains only one condition about works councils. It is very curious that those two hon. Members do not glean the same story from the same hymn sheet.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. There is much more to the social chapter than meets the eye, and no doubt Labour Members will tell the public as little about it as possible so that they do not frighten the children. The social chapter contains many measures that the European Community will want to introduce—no doubt under the guise of health and safety or by declaring that it will benefit all the people of Europe. However, the tiger economies of Asia do not face the same on-costs and, therefore, we shall find it extremely difficult to compete for export markets. We must be careful when deciding which of Brussels' rules and regulations to accept—whether or not they are in the social chapter.

The second issue is the minimum wage. The Opposition's position on that is extremely shady.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): Shady?

Mr. Evans: Yes. Opposition Members refuse to say at what wage level it would be introduced. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said that, if a minimum wage were introduced, there would be a jobs shake-out in the economy. I do not see how that view balances with that of other Labour Members who say that they care about unemployment and that they want it to decrease. However, at the same time the Opposition are prepared to introduce a minimum wage, which would result in a shake-out of jobs in the economy and lead to an increase in the number of unemployed in this country.

I am totally opposed to the concept of a minimum wage. It is estimated that, if it were introduced at £4.15, more than 1 million jobs would be lost. That would mean massive increases in the social security costs and other add-on costs that taxpayers would have to meet. While the minimum wage sounds fine in theory, in practice it would be devastating for jobs—not only in the north-west, which I represent, but in the tourist and industrial areas of this country.

I do not believe that the Labour party has a correct inflation policy or target. We forget at our peril what occurred when the last Labour Government allowed inflation to rip in this country—it was 27 per cent. at one point, and averaged 15 per cent. I run a small retail business in Swansea and I can remember wholesale prices on some goods changing regularly—perhaps twice a week—because inflation was running so high.

Pensioners on fixed incomes who had put a little aside for their old age found it very tough: they saw their savings cut in half in four years. Their pensions did not keep up with the rising rate of inflation and they suffered greatly. Their Christmas bonuses were stopped twice by that caring Labour Government.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Does my hon. Friend recall the position of private pension funds, particularly occupational pension funds, under the last Labour Government? Is he aware that the Conservative Government allocated £1 billion to the British Rail pension fund to meet the deficit that Labour left behind? Investments performed so badly in many pension funds during the 1970s that most were in deficit when the Conservatives took office. People's money was not safe in private pension funds at that time.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. Far more people have private pensions these days. Labour Members make much of the dreadful profits that industries—particularly the former nationalised industries—are making. However, they do not take account of the fact that many people rely on those industries to make a profit so that they can pay for their pensions later. It is vital that we do not forget that and I am grateful that my hon. Friend has raised that issue.

I wish to comment about the relationship between the Labour party and the trade unions. Many Labour Members, including all shadow Front Benchers, are sponsored by trade unions and the unions have half a say at the Labour party conference. Because the Government have introduced trade union reforms to ensure that the trade union barons do not dictate any longer to employees in industry, we now have good industrial relations.

What is the big message from the Labour party on the future of the economy? Is it the stakeholding economy? I cannot believe that that is the big message that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) let slip out in Singapore. I cannot believe that that soundbite policy is the big message. What is a stakeholder? What is the stakeholding economy? I remember that back between 1974 and 1979, and before, one could say that everyone

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was a stakeholder in all the nationalised industries. Those industries lost £50 million every week and taxpayers had to put their hands in their pockets and pay out for those great industries in which they were stakeholders.

Now what has happened? Those industries have been privatised. They are far more profitable and they are providing far better levels of service, in the main, than before. They are now contributing £50 million from their profits to the taxpayers. That is the sort of stakeholding that we want to see and that is what is happening now—thanks to the policies that have been introduced by the Government.

We also now have 10 million shareholders who invest directly in industry. We have also heard that some of the trade unions, through their pension funds, invest in newly nationalised industries, because there is a good rate of return for their members.

I cannot believe that stakeholding is the great idea from the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, but it would be an opportunity for the Labour party to sidle up to its friends in the trade union movement and give them a greater say in how industry is run. I cannot see how that will be of any benefit to industry.

In a speech to the Institute for Public Policy Research in London on 29 February 1996—not that long ago—John Monks, the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, explained that a stakeholding economy would mean more power for the trade unions. He called for fundamental changes to company law that would lead to

"a new industrial relations settlement'. . . A start would be a change in Company Law to widen the obligations of directors and require them to take into account the interests of the different stakeholder groups."

Mr. Monks called for "independent voices" to be appointed to company boards, including

"suppliers, the community and employees."

In a crucial passage, he explained that giving extra representation to employees would, in practice, mean extra influence for union bosses:

"employees come together collectively through trade unions. An employee stakeholder interest cannot therefore be expressed unless employees have the right to express their collective views."

There we have it, from the mouth of John Monks. The stakeholder economy would mean a transference of power from the Labour party to the trade unions, which would have a greater say in how industry was run.

We do not need to look back any further than to the years between 1974 and 1979. We do not want to revisit those days. The hon. Member for Huddersfield said that we should always remember the past, but he surely did not mean 1974-79. We should remember the past. Last year, we lost only 278,000 days through strikes, yet in 1979 we lost 29 million days. Those who cannot remember what those days were like have only to refer to the situation in France a few weeks ago.

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend remember the great stakeholder of the 1978-79 winter of discontent, one Jamie Morris? He was a hospital porter who decided which patients should be treated, whether they had cancer or a more trivial illness. That was an example of stakeholding and the Labour party's relationship with the trade unions.

Mr. Evans: I remember a trade union official making those decisions, but I did not know that his name was Jamie Morris. I also remember that if he made the wrong decision and the people died, they could not be buried because another trade union had closed all the cemeteries. Those days were wretched and miserable.

We saw glimpses of the past in France recently in the stoppages. We saw how ugly the scenes were. That is what it was like in Britain in 1974-79 and that is what it would be like again if we allowed a massive transference of power back to the trade unions. Industry now has reliability. Industrialists who produce goods want to know that those goods can be produced on time and at the right price. They also want to know that those goods will be transported so that they can be sold. Industry has changed so much that industrialists know that they now have predictability and that when goods have been produced they will get to the customers. That is what we need. Trade union reform as envisaged in the stakeholding economy is the last thing we want.

We have been successful for the past 28 months with falling unemployment. Unemployment has risen in many other European countries, especially in Germany, which has more than 4 million unemployed, and in France, which has more than 3 million unemployed. Spain has some of the highest levels of youth unemployment in Europe. It is no wonder that Felipe Gonzalez was shown the door yesterday. We have got unemployment down to 7.9 per cent. and it is still falling.

It is appropriate to send our congratulations to all those people in the employment exchanges in our constituencies who do a tremendous job giving advice and help to people looking for work. I visited two branches recently, in Clitheroe and Preston, and congratulated them on doing a splendid job and thanked them for their work. I wish them well for the future. The last thing that we want to do to the people who are looking for work is to disadvantage them by introducing policies such as the minimum wage and the social chapter.

The Government are considering ways to assist people over a certain age who are looking for jobs. I wish the Government well on that and I hope that more can be done. Agism in the work force is the last thing that we need. There is a massive resource of people over 45 who, for whatever reason, have left their jobs and are looking for work. They have a great deal to offer industry and this country. It would be a great advantage if we could entice industry to reconsider some of the older people in the work force who want to contribute that little bit more. I know that a group is advising the Department for Education and Employment at the moment, and I hope that the Government will bring forward some initiatives that will give people over a certain age more hope and opportunities to rejoin the work force.

Europe has been mentioned a few times tonight and I am not going to let the subject pass. Ann Leslie wrote a splendid article in the *Daily Mail* last week about the situation in Germany. She spent a few days over there. Germany used to be the power house of Europe, but the situation has changed dramatically and Britain is now the power house and the enterprise centre of Europe. That will continue, but Germany has stalled because of the on-costs. I do not know whether hon. Members realise that it costs one and a half to two and a half times more in social on-costs to employ somebody in Germany. It costs three times more in non-labour costs to employ somebody in France. Industries cannot afford those costs. I wish that some of the politicians in Europe would let go

of their fixation about a greater Europe and ensure that the single market, which we have now, worked more effectively. We need more improvements in the general agreement on tariffs and trade and in world trade, not a fortress Europe that will not help anybody. Politicians in Europe should also let go of their fixation with the single currency, which I do not believe will occur in 1999. Focusing attention on the single currency will not help the situation.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that non-wage labour costs are becoming increasingly important to industry? Is he aware that P and O Ferries is asking the French Government for subsidies to keep French people employed—

Mr. David Shaw: Does my hon. Friend mean Brittany Ferries?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Yes. I am grateful.

Is my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) aware that Brittany Ferries is asking the French Government for subsidies so that it might compete with P and O Ferries in Britain, which has no subsidies and whose non-wage labour costs are half those in France?

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for intervening. Subsidies are the last things with which we should become involved. That route would lead to the paying of subsidies to industries throughout Europe, which would lead in turn to a terrible stranglehold. How will that help us in competing with other countries, such as the United States, and the tiger economies of Asia?

Mr. Jim Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman argues against subsidies. May I take it that he is opposed to the Government's assistance through Europe to Coventry Jaguar? May I have an answer?

Mr. Evans: No. That is a specific point. We were looking for inward investment. We wanted to ensure that it was retained in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cunningham: Answer a straight question.

Mr. Evans: I am. We wanted to ensure that there was investment in Jaguar. I visited the Jaguar plant in Coventry not so long ago. It does splendid work, exporting more than 80 per cent. of its products. We have been able to retain Jaguar production in this country. I support Jaguar's retention here. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) wishes to ensure that subsidies are not paid because of non-essential labour costs. That form of subsidy will not help Brittany Ferries, the French Government, the French people or Europe.

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a vast difference between assisting people inwardly to invest in the United Kingdom—the Taiwanese are investing in Scotland and Nissan in Sunderland, Siemens is to become involved and there has been investment in Northern Ireland—through capital grant, and Credit Lyonnais or Brittany Ferries looking for revenue support, support for day-to-day running costs, because of high on-costs as a result of the social chapter?

Mr. Evans: Absolutely. I was trying to make that very point. My hon. Friend did so far more eloquently.

If we take the route of the social chapter and accept the addition of massive non-wage labour costs to the costs already facing industry in this country and in the rest of Europe, we shall be paying subsidies to companies from the rest of the world to come and set up in the United Kingdom. I hope that these issues will be taken up in the White Paper that is shortly to be published. Surely we wish to take Europe forward in the manner in which the United Kingdom is being taken forward so that the rest of Europe may take on board the policies that we have introduced, bearing in mind how successful we have been in reducing unemployment and attracting inward investment. If the rest of Europe followed our policies, its unemployment would fall too.

Like the hon. Member for Huddersfield, I am interested in manufacturing. British Aerospace is in my constituency. I cannot think of a finer example of the best of manufacturing industry. It represents all the necessary skills. Its work force received extensive training. It has a superb director of education in Professor Steve Grigg, who is looking at investing in local schools. Schools in my constituency have been beneficiaries of some of the money that has been made available through technology associations and through computers going into some primary schools.

British Aerospace is looking to expand education through a university for life so that it can attract some 15, 16, and 17-year-olds to enter university to obtain the necessary and right skills that will enable them to take employment with the company. The hon. Member for Huddersfield talked about training, and it is indeed vital that we achieve the right training. If we fail in that, the country will be the loser.

British Aerospace is leading the way. I hope that other industries will examine carefully what it is doing and join it or follow suit. The company operates in a competitive industry, especially with the Americans coming in hard. The tiger economies of Asia are considering how they can become involved in producing aircraft. The future will be extremely competitive. As long as British Aerospace invests in its work force, its plants and within its industry, I believe that it will succeed. We have seen that with the research and development that has gone into the European fighter aircraft. That has been achieved in collaboration with other European countries, and I hope that that is how we shall continue to go forward.

I read in the *Financial Times* over the weekend that Dick Evans of British Aerospace is talking about the European aerospace industry, in which we collaborate in several areas. That is necessary to ensure that our aerospace industry remains competitive in Europe.

Mr. Couchman: My constituency, too, benefits greatly from the arms manufacturing business. The House will be aware that the avionics division of GEC is an important high-tech company that manufactures in my constituency. One of the peace dividends for the company has been a downturn in business, which has led to a reduction in the work force from 7,000 to 3,500 over a short period. Does

[Mr. Couchman]

my hon. Friend agree that some of the rubbish that was uttered during the debate on the Scott report last week will have done our arms manufacturers no good, especially that which we heard from Opposition Members? It will have done a great deal of damage to our position as the No. 2 arms supplier in the world.

Mr. Evans: Yes, that is so. There are those who assume that big defence suppliers, such as British Aerospace and GEC, can weather any storm. That is wrong. At the same time, we must give consideration to the many small suppliers of components to GEC and British Aerospace, for example, throughout the country. When GEC and British Aerospace are hit, component suppliers are hit as well. We must pay due regard to component manufacturers, which rely on larger companies' contracts.

A fine example of the attitude of some Opposition Members is that some Labour Members have signed two early-day motions calling for the contract for the supply of Hawks to Indonesia to be stopped. That would cause the loss of hundreds of jobs in my constituency. The employees involved rely on Hawks being exported. We are assured that the aircraft are being used for defensive purposes and not against the people of East Timor. If they were being used to attack those people, I would join in the chorus and say that Hawks should not be exported.

What attitude do Labour Members take to defence manufacturing in the United Kingdom? Do they support it or do they not? As usual, questions remain unanswered. I suspect that the one that I have just posed will remain in that category.

It is not only British Aerospace in my constituency in which I take pride. I am proud of smaller industries as well, including a company called Ultraframe. Since I became a Member of this place I have seen its work force grow from 200 to more than 500. I shall not take the credit for that. Economic conditions have been right for John Lancaster, the managing director. He has been able to invest. He has a good work force and he relies on local schools to supply him with employees, whom he trains. The company is selling its products throughout the country and exporting them as well.

We must ensure that the right policies are in place to help, not hinder, businesses. That does not mean that governments are good at running businesses because we have seen in the past that they are not. In many instances, however, we must ensure that the right conditions are put in place. At the same time we must get off the backs of businesses. We are doing that with the deregulation initiative. We are ensuring that we have low inflation, competitive interest rates and that we are able to attract inward investment. Manufacturing productivity is increasing. We are the enterprise centre of Europe. We want that to continue, and that will happen with a Conservative Government.

7.18 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for having to leave the Chamber to attend a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. It was an important meeting. We took evidence on the Overseas Development Administration and decided to visit the Court of Auditors in Luxembourg to examine how it is managing its affairs and whether we are satisfied with what it is doing. The Public Accounts Committee does not usually make overseas visits, but this is an exception. So many frauds are occurring in the Community that we felt it essential to make that start.

Starting in November last year, annual assurances have been given about the way in which funds are earmarked and spent, which gives us an opportunity to ensure that we have proper control over the way in which the Court of Auditors spends its money and investigates its affairs. That is why I was away for part of the debate.

We have infrequent debates on the economy. The reason for today's debate is that the Government believe that they have a good story to tell. There are some doubts about that. The Chancellor of the Exchequer talked about "trough to trough" and chose the period 1981 to 1983. Whenever the Government talk about improvements in the economy, they always seem to forget the crucial years 1979 to 1981. What happened in those years is emblazoned in my memory. I lost one third of the manufacturing industry in my town, but not because the companies were low tech or anything like that. Some were medium tech and some were high tech. As a result of the Government's attitude to monetarism—they believed in a $2.40 pound and a 17 per cent. interest rate—opportunities were diminished in my constituency.

My community was a prosperous one. The level of employment was higher than the regional average. Pay was higher even than the national average. We had a success story, following the decline of the cotton industry. I have never forgiven the Government for what they did in those two crucial years. One third of manufacturing industry was lost. Skilled engineers, who were supposed to be in short supply, were laid off from companies that will never again be available to us. The wealth that they could have created was also lost.

The current position—I pay tribute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer—is that inflation is satisfactory. Nobody can doubt that. Relations with the Bank of England are good. Great tribute must be paid to the Chancellor for the way in which he has dealt with the Bank of England. He has not been frightened of handling it and ensuring that his own views prevailed. Not every Chancellor of the Exchequer would have done that, although a few might have. He must be given credit for the way in which the minutes are now made available. What he cannot be given credit for is investment. Investment is bad, as is the balance of payments.

Since 1992, we have had a 24 per cent. devaluation of the pound against the deutschmark. Despite that, our balance of payments has been in the red ever since. After a devaluation, there is the J-curve effect. At the beginning, one will not gain much from it, but subsequently one does. It has been three and a half years since the devaluation and we should have seen the benefit to our balance of payments, but we have not. In the lifetime of this Government, we have seen a devaluation against the deutschmark of 40 per cent.

Despite North sea oil and the enormous advantages that it has brought, the Government have failed to get our balance of payments right. That is a most serious consequence. We are now finishing the trough and are on the way up. There will be more consumption. Does

anybody believe that the balance of payments will improve as a result? Even the Red Book, which the Chancellor of the Exchequer produced, does not show such an improvement. Given the rise in consumption, there will be an even greater balance of payments deficit, which we have come to expect from the Government.

If we are at the bottom of the trough and still in deficit, I am afraid that, as we come out of it, we will be in even worse difficulty. When will we ever pay our way? The Chancellor of the Exchequer does not believe that investment is poor. In fact, the Deputy Prime Minister is trying to tell us that we do not need to invest so much because we have better management. He says that investment is good enough because of better management in industries. All I can say is that, five or 10 years ago, our investment was lower than that of almost all our industrial competitors. Did they get it wrong? Are we the only people who know how to do these things? I find that assumption astonishing.

The whole point about better management and investment is that they are not alternatives, but complementary. Decent and good management will want to invest. The failure to invest has been one of the serious consequences of this Government. I do not see how we will get our balance of payments into surplus, or at least into equilibrium, without investment in manufacturing industry. The importance of it is not so much that it creates jobs, because I do not think that we will get many jobs from investment or from the improvements and expenditure in manufacturing industry subsequently; one wants the investment to enrich the economy and to pay our way internationally so that we have the wealth to spend on housing, roads, education and the rest.

Those are the consequences of successful manufacturing industry. Faced with what the Deputy Prime Minister said in his references to manufacturing industry, I thought that I should make that quite clear. I hope that people will begin to understand the importance of manufacturing industry, as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) does. Unfortunately, all too few of his colleagues do.

7.25 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I had not intended to speak in the debate. I saw the earlier exchanges between my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on the screen in my office while I was answering some of my constituency post.

During that exchange, the hon. Gentleman did his usual trick of selling the country short, which I regret he has done consistently as an Opposition spokesman on economic matters. He seems to think that that is the way to be considered a worthy alternative occupant of No. 11 Downing street. I can tell him otherwise, for I think that people will soon learn that the Labour party has very little to offer in the way of an economic policy.

The recession has been extremely difficult in my constituency. During the recession of the early 1980s, Chatham dockyard closed, throwing out 7,000 job opportunities and many manufacturers. There was very high unemployment—some 17.5 or 18 per cent. It was a time of great sadness in my constituency.

During the relatively prosperous years of the middle 1980s, unemployment gradually fell. New jobs were created. An excellent new industrial park—Gillingham business park—was formed, and prospered, under Grosvenor Developments, which is, perhaps, the best operator of business parks that I have come across. We also had the redevelopment of Chatham dockyard by English Partnerships, formerly English Estates.

English Partnerships is developing one of the biggest development areas in Europe. We are seeing quality development there. New jobs are coming, including 1,000 jobs for the major headquarters of an insurance company, Colonial Mutual Group. The scientific units of the Overseas Development Administration have come to us and a number of other significant employers have moved in to replace the old metal-bashing jobs that prevailed during the long period during which the Royal Navy occupied Chatham dockyard.

That development has been slower than we would have liked is undeniable, and the second recession, of the late 1980s and early 1990s, has been quite hard. It particularly hit the small businesses that were formed out of the dockyard closure. Often small, single-handed or two-handed businesses, they were formed with the redundancy money of people with metal skills who had worked for many years in the royal naval dockyard in Chatham. They went into business on their own account, perhaps making, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) suggested, things for GEC, which has been a superb backbone to the constituency in which I have worked for the past 12 years.

Because of the downturn in defence orders, GEC's work force has declined from 7,000 to 3,500. Unemployment in my area has again risen to too high a level—although it has now fallen to the national average of around 8 per cent.—and we look forward to continuing development of the old Chatham dockyard by English Partnerships.

One reason for our success in Gillingham has been the unique opportunity provided by the Japanese. Some hon. Members will know the "Shogun" story: an English sailor was shipwrecked in Japan, and founded the Japanese navy. My constituency, uniquely, is twinned with two Japanese cities, which has enabled us to exploit a relationship that has caused three second-line Japanese companies to site their European headquarters at Gillingham business park.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley said, however, those Japanese companies—along with American companies—would not have chosen to site their European headquarters in this country had it not been for the current benign regime for inward investment. It is obviously important that the Japanese speak English—and the Americans speak a form of English—but it is largely because we have a flexible and skilled work force, and have not lumbered ourselves with the same social on-costs as our German, French and other European Union partners, that we have secured 40 per cent. of inward investment.

As I said in my intervention on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley, inward investment is one of the most exciting imports to this country. Major German companies such as Siemens are locating here and big Japanese companies are siting their European headquarters here, as are Taiwanese companies. As a member of the all-party group on Taiwan, I have a close relationship with that country.

Opposition Members have denigrated the state of manufacturing industry. It is certain that too much of the industry was lost in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but it

[Mr. James Couchman]

was not simply a case of monetarism, as was suggested by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). I believe that that loss resulted from our profound economic weakness at the end of the 1970s, which led to a halving of the value of our money in the five years between 1974 and 1979, and the appalling strength and irresponsibility of the trade unions. All those factors brought our industry to its knees during that recession. They will not feature now, although I share the fear expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley that, if trade union power is boosted again by some future Labour Administration, it could well drive us back to the weakness of 1979.

I am only too pleased to support what was said by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, who gave us an excellent rundown of the state of the economy. I am only sorry that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was so downbeat, and so denigrated our economic efforts.

7.33 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I listened carefully to the Chancellor's speech, and noted with interest that, according to him, middle England's prospects were balmy and ambrosial. As I have the advantage of coming from the same county as the right hon. and learned Gentleman, I have the opportunity of seeing him play both at home and away; I also know what is going on in his own back yard. I should be very surprised if people in Nottingham—which, clearly, is part of middle England—accepted his claim that the prospects are rosy. Many of them visit the Chancellor's surgery, and they tell me that they have been well received; but they tell the Chancellor that, in tax terms, they feel worse off—in effect, £670 a year worse off—since the last general election.

Some of those people will also have noted that the tax-and-prices index rose by 3.7 per cent. in 1995, and that average earnings rose by only 3.25 per cent. In effect, living standards fell. Real personal disposable incomes also fell in the second and third quarters of 1995. It would be interesting to know the figures for the fourth quarter. My impression is that things are not rosy for taxpayers in Nottinghamshire, who look askance at the Chancellor's figures suggesting that they will be £800 a year better off as a result of the last Budget. They do not believe that, because it is unbelievable: it implies a growth rate of 3 per cent. and a wages increase of 4 per cent.

I note that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has been present for most of the debate. Last month, he told the House that real incomes had fallen in 1995. Things are not balmy and rosy in Nottinghamshire now, and people know that they can expect another tax rise soon. Many local authorities are setting council taxes this week. The Chief Secretary has told us that he has worked on the assumption of an 8 per cent. rise nationally, but I can tell him that the rise in Nottinghamshire will be around 4 per cent.—still more than 50 per cent. the rate of inflation. I suspect that the average increase in council tax in England as a whole will be around 6 per cent., and it is likely to be about 15 per cent. in Scotland. The Government have taken measures today to try to mitigate the effects of that, but the fact remains that things are not rosy. People have less money in their pockets; their council taxes are to increase; and, worse, they are paying more and receiving less.

Nottinghamshire county council set its budget last Thursday. It is to spend £12 million, or 3.4 per cent., more on education than is allowed by the Government's guideline, the standing spending assessment. In his Budget, and in the subsequent financial settlement for local authorities, the Chancellor boasted that Nottinghamshire would have an extra £18.5 million to spend on schools. Next year, the Labour-controlled council will spend an extra £25 million on education, but, despite that, school budgets are being cut by £5 million and 200 teaching jobs are at risk. The prospects are not rosy for those who live in Nottinghamshire.

People complain not just about the revenue costs of education, but about the capital costs. The way in which last November's Budget cut capital spending has not received enough publicity. The state of schools across the country can be described only as deplorable. Local authorities made bids for £1.9 billion to repair, refurbish and replace schools, and they received a borrowing allocation of £416 million.

At schools in rosy Nottinghamshire, there are outstanding repairs of £85 million. If the Chancellor cared to look in his backyard—his constituency of Rushcliffe—he would find that £6.8 million worth of repairs to schools are outstanding. At Rushcliffe comprehensive school—an excellent school, which is only 200 yd from his house—£1.5 million worth of repairs are outstanding.

We need to invest in education—in revenue and in capital terms—and in higher and further education. Education can drive the economy. I noted with interest that the Chancellor is a member of the court of Nottingham university, and that he has an honorary degree from there. Its capital spending has been reduced by 47 per cent. for next year, and the funding per student reduced by 28 per cent.

If the Chancellor took an interest in such matters, he would also know that capital funding for colleges of further education has been reduced by 70 per cent. We have to invest in higher and further education if we want to skill people for a new, changing and dynamic industry. We must provide new equipment and modern techniques and training methods, but the resources that have been made available do not do that.

Let us consider the rosy Nottinghamshire economy. Textiles and engineering are struggling, and the manufacturing base needs investment. There has been a lack of investment and, as the economic cycle picks up, they will face real problems.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Can the hon. Gentleman share with the House exactly how he thinks that the social chapter and the minimum wage will encourage investment for the hard-struck business men of this country?

Mr. Tipping: Above all, we must move from a low-skill and low self-esteem economy to one that invests in people, puts them at the cornerstone of our economic future and teaches them to adapt and work in teams. It should also teach them how to become enterprising and demonstrate that they can have a stake in the running of their country. That is the fundamental—

Mr. Sykes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tipping: No, I will not give way again.

That is the fundamental difference. Many Opposition Members believe that investment in education and training is how to make progress—not through an unskilled and unrewarded labour force.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): The hon. Gentleman said that he wants to move from a low-skill, low-wage economy to one which is high-skill, high-wage and highly productive. Those objectives are excellent, but how does he propose achieving them? It would be helpful if he would express not his aspirations but his policies.

Mr. Tipping: If the hon. Gentleman will restrain himself for a short while, I shall give him some concrete examples.

The recovery in Nottinghamshire was patchy. I should like to use this opportunity—while the President of the Board of Trade is in the Chamber—to talk a little about the Nottinghamshire coalfield and about coalfield communities in general. He will recall that, in 1980, there were 40,000 miners in Nottinghamshire. Today, there are fewer than 3,000. Privatisation has occurred, but the future is uncertain. He will know of the uncertainties that face investments in coal and the future of the Annesley colliery. He will know that Bilsthorpe colliery, which is one of RJB Mining's collieries, is due to close next year. He will know about the difficulties of Asfordby, a super-pit developed under British Coal, which may now never come into production. He will know of the challenge caused by the new contracts with the generators, which begin in 1998.

Mining is a very difficult industry. It has been in decline and it needs help. I have stressed the need for help, and I now ask for the help of the President of the Board of Trade in relation to another matter. This afternoon, there was a serious—perhaps fatal—accident at Thoresby colliery, in Nottinghamshire. The details about it are still coming through. It is the second serious accident at that colliery in the past five months. I ask the President of the Board of Trade to talk very seriously to the mines inspectorate, because people who work underground, and their families, are under pressure. I hope that he will ensure that there is a full investigation into the accident and that lessons are learnt from it so that the men who go underground, from whom we all benefit, will be more reassured about the future.

Given the scale of the rundown of the mining industry, it is important to consider what has happened in employment and unemployment in Nottinghamshire. Since October 1992, when the current Deputy Prime Minister announced the closure of the collieries, unemployment has fallen nationally by 17 per cent. In coalfield areas, the fall has been nowhere near that. Over the same period, in the Mansfield travel-to-work area, unemployment fell by only 7 per cent, and in the Worksop travel-to-work area unemployment fell hardly at all. A scenario is emerging of a greater gap between relatively affluent areas and areas of disadvantage.

I am not asking the President of the Board of Trade to spend extra money on mining areas. I ask him to do the following. First, I ask him to make an early announcement about the sale of British Coal Enterprise, which has brought jobs into the coalfield communities, and to ensure that successor organisations pick up its mantle and continue to develop those jobs.

Secondly, I should be obliged if the right hon. Gentleman would carefully look at the difficulties over the transfer of some 80 sites from British Coal to English Partnerships. Discussions have been taking place about that for months, if not years, and the deal is still not done. I understand the issues in relation to liabilities and insuring against them, but those sites are essential to create new jobs in the area. I cannot understand why greater efforts have not been made to ensure that a deal is struck and that the sites are put to productive use.

I also want to speak about youth unemployment. The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), who has left the Chamber, asked me how we can achieve objectives. One achievement would be to examine youth unemployment and to remedy it. The current scene can be described only as a shambles. In January this year, there were 619,982 young people out of work, of whom 136,000 had been out of work for more than a year. Four thousand of those people have been out of work for more than five years—or, put another way, they have probably never worked productively in their lives. It is important that those young people do not lose hope or represent a waste of talent. They represent an opportunity, and we should be using them. We should examine our approach and policies on young people.

I support in principle the modern apprenticeships scheme, which was launched on 1 April 1995. It should now have 60,000 young people in training.

Mr. Sykes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for indulging me again. If he is so concerned about youth unemployment, how does he explain the fact that Spain's youth unemployment is running at 33 per cent. because of the social chapter, which I mentioned earlier, and the minimum wage? What will he say to young people in his surgery in years to come if the Labour Government gain power and impose on business the social chapter and the minimum wage, which will lead directly to the youth unemployment that he is complaining about?

Mr. Tipping: I would say to young people, "You have rights and responsibilities too." For 4,000 young people to be out of work for more than five years reflects badly not only on the economy, but on them. We must ensure that the cost of youth unemployment is worked out.

Sixty thousand modern apprentices should be in training; today, only 15,000 youngsters have gone into the modern apprenticeship scheme. That needs to be re-evaluated and relaunched. The real problem is that, for employers to take on a modern apprentice, they must commit to train them over three years. I understand that, because the economic position is hard to foresee, many employers are reluctant to enter into that commitment.

I should like the President of the Board of Trade to consider a report on youth unemployment that will be published this week by the training and enterprise councils' national body. It will say that 250,000 18 to 20-year-olds are out of work. One in eight of that age group is out of work, out of training and out of education. The cost to the state through benefit payments, crime and other factors is £350 million. What a waste of money. We should have new priorities and be working towards from-welfare-to-work schemes and putting those youngsters back into work to make them productive. That is the sort of programme that I want and it can come by recycling existing resources.

[Mr. Tipping]

It is important to put young people first, to train them to have high skills, to make them adaptable and enterprising and to give them the skills to work in a team. We should excite and enthuse them and consider getting them to work in the environment. I look forward to a revamped community action team scheme that considers environmental issues.

It is crazy that the home energy efficiency scheme has been cut by £31 million. A total of 200,000 fewer homes will not be insulated. We could have a scheme to insulate homes, to guard and enhance the environment, and to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, but, at the same time, to reduce bills and unemployment. We could create 50,000 jobs. Young people should be clearing derelict areas. In any former industrial area, there is plenty of work for young people.

Young people must have rights and responsibilities, We must stop the waste, recycle and refocus it and give it a higher priority. Over the centuries, miners have always wished better for their children than they have had. They and I believe that, for the first time for generations, their young children face a worse time than they do. Coming from a coalfield community, that is one of my concerns. That is no way to drive forward an economy. We must get young people into work. We must invest in them, in training, in education and, most important, in all our futures.

7.53 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I am pleased to be able to make a good-news speech. There can be no doubt that the amount of good news about the economy recently has been incredible. It has been completely transformed in a host of sectors. We are unquestionably out of a recession that has been tough, long, deep and worldwide, but we have come out of it in good shape.

We know that many changes are taking place in the labour market. They have contributed towards the so-called feel-good factor not being as good as one would like and as the recovery that we are experiencing would normally produce, but the reason is that the labour market is changing enormously, and the number of people in stable, long-term employment—as distinct from shorter-term employment—has changed.

That is a continuing change, with the labour market demanding more flexibility. Provided that the earnings and job creation are there, however, that is no reason why the country should not enjoy not only a period of sustained economic growth, but a sustained opportunity for people to accumulate savings, provide for their future, and create more personal wealth and assets for the future, which I and Conservative Members believe could be a prosperous future for our population.

That is being achieved by a sustained policy of keeping inflation at record low levels. At 2.9 per cent., it is at one of its lowest consistent levels for the past 40 years. Some evidence exists that it will continue at that level for a long time. It compares favourably with the inflation level when we came to office in 1979, when under Labour it averaged at about 15.5 per cent.

With low inflation comes reducing unemployment, which has been falling for about three years. Interest rates are very low—they are at some of the lowest levels in the post-war period. In some cases, they are the lowest levels for 50 years in terms of what business is able to borrow at.

In the 1950s, when interest rates were consistently and over a long period at levels approaching today's, the margins at which banks required lending to take place were much higher than today. Today, many businesses are borrowing at just 1.5 per cent. over base rates. In the 1950s, when interest rates were at a similarly low level, businesses often had to borrow at 2, 3 and 4 per cent. above base rates, so the cost of borrowing money to British business is also at record low levels.

When we came into office in 1979, because inflation was so high, banks and savers required a higher rate of return on their money. The consequence was that, when Labour left office, British businesses were having to borrow at about 18 per cent.—a horrendous rate. Today, British business often borrows at 7 to 8 per cent. That is a tremendously improved position compared with Labour's term in office. It is also a good position compared with the Conservative Government's record over 16 years, and with the past 50 years.

I am delighted that the graphs and newspapers at the weekend showed that the number of house price sales has increased modestly. The increase is not massive, but we would not want that. It might be inflationary, and, for young people trying to buy homes, lead to the difficulties that occurred towards the end of the 1980s. We want to avoid the house price spiral of the 1980s. Surely the best way to do that is by having a much more stable economy than when we had uncontrolled growth—welcome though that growth was to some people, who often accumulated their first house and property.

The position is much improving. I hope that, under broadcasting laws, the media devotes as much time to the recovery as it did to the recession. Reporting success stories and some good news stories would be most welcome. British industry and British business has been transformed.

There are still one or two problems. East Kent, for better or for worse, is blessed with being close to France. The East Kent Initiative—a body that promotes east Kent—recently advertised a young people's job training scheme, under which those between the ages of 18 and 27 could get three months work experience in France, attend language schools and live with host families. They would not incur any expenditure, as they would receive a moderate income to cover their costs.

Last year, eight out of 10 young people who went on the scheme found work when they returned to the United Kingdom, directly as a result of expanding their skills and getting better training on the scheme. This year, the scheme has been advertised in the jobcentres of east Kent, where some 9,000 young people aged between 18 and 27 are registered as unemployed. Yet, until very recently, only one young person had applied to go on the scheme. That is incredible, when there are supposedly 9,000 young people unemployed. It is a wonderful work experience scheme, with a good record of success in getting young people into work, yet only one youngster applied—although I understand that a second has now done so.

Our competitive position, both in Europe and worldwide, is very good. The latest good news statistic, about which we should be crying from the rooftops to ensure that everyone is aware of it, is that Britain is now exporting more per head of population than Japan. That is another major achievement under a Conservative Government. The Opposition say that Britain is low on

the prosperity league; they say that many countries, including Japan, are ahead of us. The reality is that, in many statistical areas, Britain is well ahead of Japan.

Mr. Sykes: Is it not much more expensive to employ a German than an Englishman; a Spaniard than an Englishman; or a Frenchman than an Englishman? Is my hon. Friend aware that, today, Hyundai announced its intention to invest £850 million in building a factory in Britain? Is that not a good example of why Britain is doing so well and why companies are queuing up to invest here? Of course, if the Opposition were in power, the position would be quite the reverse.

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Japanese, American and South Korean companies are queuing up to invest in this country. It is a great success story, because, as my hon. Friend said, there are higher unit labour costs in France in Germany and in Spain—which also has the social chapter and the minimum wage.

Spain has just thrown out its Labour Government, as has Australia. High wage costs put people out of work. In France, when someone loses his job, he is unemployed for three years on average; in Spain it is four years—but in the United Kingdom, it is only nine months on average. A young person in France has to wait 22 months for a job; in this country, he has a good chance of getting a job within nine months.

That is why our method of running the economy, with no social chapter, has been so successful. France and Spain, with their minimum wages and socialist policies, have followed the path of utter madness. Germany, which is run by what we might almost call a Conservative Government, has fallen prey to many socialist policies that have increased its wage costs. The minimum wage and the other costs of the social agreement are so high that jobs are not being created. Indeed, Germany is now exporting jobs, because many German companies want to set up in Britain.

Reference was made earlier to one of the problems of French socialism—the higher indirect costs that companies have to pay for the labour force. In particular—this affects my constituency—there is the outrageous practice of French ferry companies being subsidised either by the French nationalised railway, which has £30 billion of debt, or by the French Government.

It is appalling that our industry in Dover, which is highly competitive and unsubsidised, is being forced to compete with a subsidised French ferry industry. Those subsidies should be stopped and the ships taken off the routes, because they are not as efficient as P and O, Stena Sealink and other British ferry and hovercraft companies that sail out of Dover. The ferry industry in Dover is efficient, while the French has subsidised inefficiency, paid for from massive borrowings by the French Government or French nationalised industry.

Some hon. Members have questioned Britain's manufacturing base. I find it remarkable that they should allege that it is shrinking. The question I want to pose—which I hope my right hon. Friend will answer—is, what do current manufacturing statistics actually mean? About one third of the worldwide computer games industry is produced in the midlands. Britain is better at producing computer games than many American or Japanese companies. Indeed, many foreign companies are trying to invest in or buy Britain's companies. Alternatively, they buy our products. It is a whole new industry that did not exist under Labour. Indeed, it did not exist even a few years ago under a Conservative Government.

Does that industry come into the manufacturing statistics when it manufactures a computer game, or does it come into the service industry statistics when it produces the software that goes into the computer game? Many companies are not included in the manufacturing statistics, yet they employ people in jobs that ultimately manufacture a product or produce computer software that is sold in boxes on the shelves. I regard that as a manufacturing product just as much as a car or a computer.

While on the subject of computers, and in view of my right hon. Friend's previous job as Secretary of State for Scotland, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that 60 per cent.—almost two thirds—of Europe's computers are made in Scotland. Would they still have an export market if they bore the seal, "This computer has to bear a Labour Government tartan tax"? A computer manufactured by employees paying a tartan tax would not be exported past the port of Dover. It would be too expensive to justify the production and sale of such goods on the European market.

There has been tremendous change for the good in our economy under this Government. One point typifies how privatised industries are much more efficient than they were when they were in the public sector. In 1983, when British Telecom was still suffering from the lack of investment under the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979, I started a business. It took me six months to get a telephone line for that business. I would have gone out of business had I not been able to borrow a friend's telephone line.

Last year, some 12 years later, my wife needed a telephone line for her new business, and she got it in two days. That is the difference between today and when Labour was in power. My wife also had to pay less in real terms for that business telephone than I did 12 years earlier. BT is enormously more efficient, and provides a much better service today under a Conservative Government than it did when it was in the public sector under Labour.

Under the trade unions, Labour talks about stakeholding. As trade union leaders have pointed out, it is another way of taking us back to the 1970s and the interference in British business and industry. Stakeholding is a threat not only to people's jobs and futures but to their private and occupational pension schemes. Those pension schemes have to invest in British business and industry. Stakeholding would damage people's investments through their private pension schemes. It would result in lower returns and the Government and trade unions having a say in the returns and profit of British business.

If business and industry are not making the same returns and profits, where will the dividends come from to pay 10 million occupational pensions and 5 million pensions in private pension schemes? If stakeholding ever got out off the ground, the pensions of 15 million people who had spent years saving for their retirement would be lower, which would be enormously damaging. Their pensions would be under threat as a result of stakeholding.

Labour is also a high-tax party. Regardless of the state of the economy, it is always making commitments to higher taxation and more spending. Although it says that

[Mr. Shaw]

it has not made any spending commitments, Labour Members of Parliament, Labour parliamentary candidates and Labour Members of the European Parliament are making speeches in which they are promising spending increases under Labour. They try not to tell the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) about the promises; they try to make them discreetly in local newspapers.

In my local newspaper, my local Labour Member of the European Parliament has even talked about a tax reduction. He has said that he would lower alcohol duty to French levels. He gave away £3 billion of a future Labour Government's funds just like that, in one little speech of a few words, which were very easily delivered to the local newspaper. Of course he did not have the approval of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East or the Labour Front-Bench team, but he was able to promise it to the trades people of Dover and my constituents none the less.

I hope that the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) will disown the Labour Member of the European Parliament for Kent, East, say that his commitment was false, that the promise was totally unjustified, and that there is no authorisation from the Labour Front-Bench team for giving away a tax reduction of £3 billion on alcohol duty.

I also hope that hon. Gentleman will have a word with the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the shadow Health Secretary, and that she will be invited to comment on whether the shadow health team supports the statement on the reduction of alcohol duty made by the Labour Member of the European Parliament for Kent, East. Labour Members of the European Parliament are making false promises in local newspaper articles which they are not authorised to deliver. It is disgraceful that Labour is offering the British public so many misleading promises.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Did the Prime Minister have the Chancellor's authority when he promised to abolish capital gains tax?

Mr. Shaw: If the hon. Gentleman reads the Prime Minister's words very carefully, he will realise not only that the Prime Minister had the full support of the Chancellor, but that it is the Conservative party's long-term aim to abolish capital gains tax.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): Hear, hear.

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend has just said, "Hear, hear." My hon. Friends are very confident that we can deliver that long-term aim. We do not think that capital gains tax is sensible in the long term. It discourages the accumulation of capital, saving and job creation.

Mr. Deva: Am I correct in assuming that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is the First Lord of the Treasury and does not therefore require the permission of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor?

Mr. Shaw: Despite the fact that my hon. Friend might be correct, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the First Lord of Treasury are totally united on the point; there is no division—unlike in the Labour party where we hear from time to time odd bits of animosity between one or two leading members of the Labour Front-Bench team. They do not always agree with one another.

At the weekend, the shadow Secretary of State for Wales decided that he did not like the Prince of Wales. We discovered that the Labour party immediately had to retract the statement on his behalf—before he could retract it himself, it would appear. It is in such a panic about the possibility of debating the monarchy because it knows that so many of its members want to abolish the monarchy, which would be bad for our economy and would certainly not gain the support of people in the United Kingdom, who think about the issues and are concerned about them.

Mr. Sykes: It would be a pity to leave the subject of capital gains tax without my hon. Friend commenting on the following point. Does he think that it is a shame that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) has illustrated his lack of understanding about business? The hon. Gentleman should be calling for the abolition of capital gains tax, because that is exactly what business needs to be able to expand. Family companies are desperate for the Government to abolish capital gains tax. Is that not an illustration of new Labour, old tricks?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend speaks with considerable authority about family businesses. Indeed, he has experienced building a business, establishing a number of jobs and ensuring not only that those jobs are secure and safe, but that more will be available in the future. Anybody who has any experience whatever of job creation knows that capital gains tax is one of the taxes that damage job creation. If the Labour party were serious about wanting to create employment and reduce unemployment, it would also be calling for the abolition of capital gains tax.

Getting income tax rates down is very important. I believe that we should be looking seriously at the flat rate tax that has had an airing in the United States. It could not be introduced in the short term in this country, but if the economy continues to grow under a Conservative Government, there will be opportunities around 1999 seriously to consider its benefits. If we had a £7,000 exemption or an allowance of £5,000 per person, we might be able to have a flat rate tax of 15 per cent. That would benefit many people, and would take many others out of tax altogether.

I know that the Treasury's initial costings, which my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury produced, suggested that it could be quite expensive to bring a flat rate tax into being, but I point out to my hon. Friend that, when the Treasury did the costings, it did not envisage abolishing all the allowances that it would be possible to abolish if we had one tax allowance at the start of the assessment for flat rate tax of £5,000 to £7,000 per person or per household.

I believe that the cost of introducing a flat rate tax could be well below the initial figure of £26 billion which the Treasury produced if we abolished more allowances, by giving a generous allowance on the flat rate tax, and by having a rate of no more than 15 per cent. We should encourage serious debate on that.

The debate must be more serious than Labour's proposals for a 10 per cent. income tax. We have never seen Labour's proposals; they were a soundbite in a speech, then they vanished from the airwaves. I hope that the 10 per cent. income tax soundbite will be explored vociferously by my hon. Friends, because I would like to know what has happened to the 10 per cent. basic rate of tax.

Where is Labour's proposal on that? Why can we not see some costings? I am sure that the Treasury would co-operate by making its computers available to cost Labour's 10 per cent. income tax proposal. We should hear how the proposal would be put into effect, because so far all we have heard is a short wave soundbite, rather than a long wave policy. We have not even heard any guidelines, let alone an explanation of the policy itself.

The economy is improving enormously, day by day and month by month. There is no doubt that the United Kingdom is now getting overseas investment in record amounts. We are seeing unemployment fall substantially, on a regular and sustained basis. We see some of the best good news features that we have seen for some time.

There are still some problems; I referred to the fact that the flexibility required in the labour force today is different from what was required before. People must adapt to the changed labour market, but those who can and do adapt—those who have been on Government retraining schemes and those who are taking time out to learn new skills, to get up-to-date information technology and to learn all the requirements of the labour market—have great opportunities under a Conservative Government in the rest of the 1990s.

Those people will see the benefits of an improving economy. We must ensure that the conditions are in place to encourage them to get the full benefits. One way in which people can get the full benefits that the new industries and the new businesses of the 1990s can offer is by re-electing a Conservative Government when the election comes in the next 12 months.

8.22 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I had hoped, certainly in the interests of the 65 million people of this country, that the level of debate among Conservative Members would be higher. I had hoped that, regardless of party politics, the Government would put the country first, and would start to outline the true state of the country's economy and how they intended to remedy it. In fact, all we got was a little bit of knockabout from the Chancellor instead of constructive ideas and constructive proposals. I have sat here since 3.30 pm, thinking that the debate is all stage-managed to lift the morale of the Tory party, with an eye on the by-election in South-East Staffordshire.

I must respond to some of what has been said in the debate, especially what has been said about 1979, to which I shall come in a little while. The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) said that a Labour candidate for the European Parliament had talked about a reduction in beer tax to French levels. I do not know about the French levels, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that I and a number of his colleagues listened to evidence in the Select Committee that considered beer tax. We looked at the effect of the import of French wines and beers on this country, especially in terms of the black market, and we discussed the consequences for the north of England, where people were threatened to make them sell imported wines and spirits. If the hon. Gentleman has a good look round the north of England, he will be aware of the protection rackets there, and he may change his mind. He may then not pour ridicule on the proposal. I do not necessarily agree with it, but I know that there are serious concerns. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman has a good look at the report and takes a more serious interest in it.

Conservative Members extolled the Tory party's virtues in terms of its management of the economy. They said that we managed our economy better than any other country on the continent and, by implication, better than the Japanese and the Americans. I am reminded of when I went to Germany and looked at the tramline system in Frankfurt. When I arrived, some Germans who spoke impeccable English said, "How is the weather on the islands?" I said, "I do not come from the Scottish islands. I come from mainland Britain." One of the Germans said, "That is the point." The moral of the story is that the Tories are saying exactly what the Germans said to me. They are supposed to be co-operating in the single market, yet they do not believe in it.

Another theme running through the debate—it came up during the Chancellor's speech and we never got a response to this point—is the question of insecurity, which also predominates in the Tory party's sister party in the United States. There is insecurity among middle-class and working-class people today, on both sides of the Atlantic. People feel as if they do not have a future. Newt Gingrich has gone on record as saying that the American Congress should debate the matter and that it will be a major issue during the next presidential election. The Tories should not pour ridicule on that. If they want to talk about the feel-good factor, they must address themselves to the problem of insecurity. They did not address the problem tonight, although it affects the well-being of the 65 million people of this country. We are not talking about little sections of this country. If we cannot address the issue, we have a major problem. Certainly, Conservative Members have a major problem in lifting the morale of their party. That is not a task for me.

Mr. Sykes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cunningham: Not for the moment.

Equally, I was interested that Conservative Members poured ridicule on France, despite the fact that a sister party is in power. One can assume only that the French Government are pursuing the same economic policies as this Government. The same people poured ridicule on Germany and said that we would now outstrip Germany. However, it is only 20-odd years ago that the Conservative party, under a previous Prime Minister, told this country that if Britain got involved in Europe, we would get more holidays, better pensions and a number of other benefits. That was a version of the social chapter from which the Tories have systematically run away during the years since Maastricht. What hypocrisy. The Tories run away and pick only what suits them. When something does not suit them, they take another road.

We have referred tonight to middle England. I represent a constituency, Coventry, South-East, which is part of middle England; it is part of the west midlands which is, in turn, part of middle England. The west midlands was noted as the engine house of the British economy, but we

[Mr. Cunningham]

can see what the Tories have done to it over the past 16 years. One can go further. The Tories mention the winter of discontent in 1978-79, but they fail to say that there was also a winter of discontent in 1970, with the advent of a Tory Government. What happened when that Government took office? If I remember correctly, house prices doubled. I remember the three-day week, the Conservatives' equivalent of the 1978-79 winter of discontent. In addition, there was a summer of discontent last summer. The House will remember the nurses' pay dispute and parents marching to demand better teachers and classroom facilities.

The Government have betrayed Coventry's young people. Nearly one third of the city's 16 to 25-year-olds are unemployed; in the west midlands as a whole, the figure is 21 per cent. for the same age group. Many of them have no formal qualifications—that is not surprising, given that 30 per cent. of Coventry's 16-year-olds are not in full-time education. The figure rises to 51 per cent. of all 17-year-olds. With their cuts in youth training and services, the Government have betrayed the hopes and life chances of a generation. Youth unemployment on such a scale represents a massive waste of talent and ability, a waste that we cannot afford financially or socially.

Youth unemployment is personally disastrous and socially destructive, and helps to produce crime and the decay of our very social fabric. What many people in Coventry will find most disturbing is the fact that 16 to 24-year-olds account for 51 per cent. of the convictions in the city. That is a result in part of the failure of the education system, created by the Government, the lack of youth training and the decimation of the job opportunities that are open to young people. The responses to a crime survey in Coventry demonstrated that many people have realised that fewer facilities for young people contribute to rising crime in the city, and the Government must accept responsibility for that.

I invite either the President of the Board of Trade or the Chancellor to come to Coventry and the west midlands. It is noticeable that they can make big speeches on what they are supposed to be doing for the country in the cloisters of the House of Commons, but they do not come to open public meetings to justify their policies. Instead, they leave it to local councillors to defend the Government's decision on cuts. As a result of systematic cuts by the Government in the past 10 to 15 years, the council in Coventry is considering cuts in the wages and conditions of employees—particularly lower-paid workers, such as cleaners.

The minimum wage has been mentioned by Tory Members in the debate, but I have not noticed the Conservatives' sister party in America talking about abolishing the USA's minimum wage. Pat Buchanan raised that issue when he was fighting the South Carolina primary, and he got his answer—he did not win.

Mr. Sykes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cunningham: In a moment. In addition, investment is now going to South Carolina and other places in the depressed south from abroad, and—in certain places—2,000 to 3,000 jobs have been created by that investment. The Tories' argument against a minimum wage does not stand up.

Mr. Sykes *rose—*

Mr. Cunningham: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is obviously very anxious.

Mr. Sykes: I am very grateful. I thought that I was going to have to get up and down like a yo-yo, but the hon. Gentleman has kindly given way. Does he agree with the deputy Leader of the Opposition, who said that any silly fool knows that unemployment will come as a result of the minimum wage?

Mr. Cunningham: I do not think that my right hon. Friend said that and, if he did, I do not know in what context it was said. The hon. Gentleman must not quote people out of context, as the hon. Member for Dover has.

Referring back to the 1970s, I recall the real problems that were related to the winter of discontent. Hon. Members may recall that OPEC raised oil prices, basically because the Conservative party said that we should not give aid to the third world. The third world replied that it did not want charity, but would certainly start raising oil prices.

Much has been made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the virtues—or lack of them—of the Government. But the debate today is all about the Government trying to cover up their mismanagement of the economy. They have suffered a series of by-election defeats in the past two or three years, and they know what will happen in South-East Staffordshire. That is what this debate is all about.

8.34 pm

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): I wish to speak not just as a Member of Parliament, but as a manufacturer with a factory in Filey, close to Scarborough. I am also the director of our family business, which was started in 1845. The firm has survived Whig Governments and Liberal Governments—it has even survived Labour Governments.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Hear, hear.

Mr. Sykes: It only just survived. I hear the hon. Gentleman saying, "Hear, hear." He will be happy to know that my grandfather was responsible for helping to break the general strike in Huddersfield in 1926, a story that I shall tell my grandchildren when I am rocking them on my knee.

I also speak as probably the only Member of Parliament who has gained the class I HGV licence—it took me two goes, but I passed it in 1978.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): What does that have to do with it?

Mr. Sykes: I hear the hon. Lady. I have driven lorries and delivered oil to my customers to keep my customers, in spite of the Labour Government. I mentioned that fact because it does have something to do with today's debate.

The Chancellor, the Government and the Conservative party need no lectures from a party of lecturers, whose only experience of employment is limited to the thousands of research assistants based in Millbank. I joined the

family firm—a company called Shaw fuels in Huddersfield—in 1974 when I left school. At the time, we were delivering 400 million gallons of heavy fuel oil a year to factories and mills all over the United Kingdom. When I left school in 1974, Harold Wilson was Prime Minister. By the time I had become manager of the Yorkshire oil depot in 1979, Jim Callaghan was Prime Minister.

I recall the Labour party's winter of discontent. At the tender age of 22, I was in charge of the Yorkshire oil distribution depot. I remember clearly a grown man coming to me and weeping, because his wife and child had received threatening phone calls from trade unionists as he had driven a lorry through a picket line to deliver oil to a hospital. That is real Labour. I was only 22 at the time, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. That man was worried for his wife and family, because trade unionists—those pals of the Opposition—had threatened his wife and child. I shall never forget that.

I also recall going on bended knee to members of a trade union strike committee, to plead with them to allow my lorries to deliver heavy fuel oil to Redfearn's National Glass, because the secondary picket there would not let the lorries through. Had those lorries not got through, the kilns would have run out of oil. As a result, the kilns would have dried up, gone cold and cracked, and 4,000 people in Barnsley would have been out of work. We finally got our way, and our private family company delivered oil when that company needed it badly, and that is why that company is still there today.

I remember one trade union leader commenting at the time that secondary picketing was "anarchy gone mad". But what else is anarchy, if not mad and chaotic? I remember one particularly sordid moment in 1979 when the gravediggers went on strike, and it was said at the time that there would be severe cases of panic dying. The whole country, and business in particular, breathed a huge sigh of relief when the Labour party was finally chucked out of government on 5 May 1979.

Mr. Simon Burns (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): It was 3 May.

Mr. Sykes: My hon. Friend is older than me.

The first thing that the Government did was to sort out the unions—in the teeth of opposition from Labour Members. The second thing that they had to do was to sort out the nationalised industries, which they did via privatisation—in the teeth of opposition from Labour Members. Now, in 1996, British Telecom is cabling the world. British Airways is the world's favourite airline. How many Labour Members remember what a pantomime horse British Airways was in 1979? Do they remember coming back from their holidays to find the baggage controllers on strike, so that they could not get their luggage out of the aeroplane? I remember it clearly. British Aerospace is selling defence products from one end of the world to the other. Rolls-Royce sells its engines across the world. British Gas is laying pipelines across the world. All those were nationalised industries.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sykes: I shall give way in a minute, if the hon. Gentleman can hold his fire. He is a fiery, passionate Scottish Member. I have spoken to him many times and respect him.

British Steel is a world-famous company in 1996. I do not remember anyone saying that back in the 1970s. Today, it is an example to the world of the sort of company that we want. Before I became a Member of Parliament, I went on a business trip to Malaysia with my brother in 1990. The news on the front pages there was that they were going to privatise their steel industry the next year. That was an example of how the rest of world is following British Tory policies.

To add to my story about British Steel, there is a famous Sheffield beer called Stones Bitter. The firm that brews it wanted to associate itself more closely with Sheffield. How better to do that than by associating its beer with British Steel? It got a fancy advertising agency up from London.

Mr. Cunningham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sykes: I shall give way in a second, I am coming to my peroration. It is a good story. Unless the hon. Gentleman is considering putting an advertising agency together, he ought to listen to this story.

People from the fancy advertising company came all the way from London to Sheffield. They looked for a firm that could produce grimy men in hard hats shovelling things into furnaces, because that exemplified steel. They could not find one, because British Steel is so modern that everything is mechanised. They had to go to Czechoslovakia to do an advertisement about British Steel. That is where the old-fashioned practices are. British Steel is a wonderful company and a wonderful example of what private capital and privatisation can do. It was the Government who privatised it.

Mr. Cunningham: May I take the hon. Gentleman back slightly, to before he went into his fantasy? What does he think would have happened to Rolls-Royce in the early 1970s if the Government then had pursued the same policies that the present Government pursue? Does he recall that it was a Tory Government who, when Rolls-Royce collapsed, set it up as a separate company under Government control? What does he have to say about Rover in that period?

Mr. Sykes: Rolls-Royce was taken in by the Conservative Government under my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), but it was privatised by Baroness Thatcher. The Labour party voted against that. It stood up for Red Robbo. I remember as if it were yesterday, driving through Bradford in 1980. I turned the radio on and heard that, for the first time, Red Robbo had been beaten. I knew that once we had beaten him, we had won the argument.

Dr. Reid: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sykes: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I want a word with him in the Lobby afterwards.

Dr. Reid: I shall not take the hon. Gentleman back, because he started in about 1834 in a short speech and has only got to 1980. If all the vast economic improvements that he is talking about are real, why have we fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league?

Mr. Sykes: That is not the sort of intervention that I was hoping to get from the hon. Gentleman. It does not justify his standing in the House.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): Yes it does.

Mr. Sykes: No, my hon. Friend is being unfair.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already dealt with that. The Labour party has used wrong figures for its own purposes; I do not know why.

To go back to another unanswered question, the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping), who is not in his place, would not answer the question that I asked, because he was banging on about unemployment of young people. I asked him why he thought that unemployment in Spain was 33 per cent. He could not answer. I could have told him, but he would not give way. It is because of the minimum wage and the social chapter.

Unemployment is high in France, Spain and Germany because of the minimum wage and the social chapter. Why is unemployment lower in the United Kingdom? It is because we do not have a minimum wage or social chapter. Everyone thinks that Scarborough and Whitby are all about tourism, but there is much more to them than that. They have manufacturing, service industries, financial services and second-line engineering. There is tons of stuff that goes on. We used to build ships. We built Captain Cook's ship.

We have plenty of manufacturing expertise in my constituency, of which I am proud. We have Pindars, a leading international company that sells goods and services all over the world. Plaxtons is famous for building coaches, which it is turning out like nobody's business. Even as I speak, it is selling them right across Europe. We have McCain, which is a wonderful example of how to start a business. Its productivity is increasing 10 per cent., year by year.

Mr. Deva: Does my hon. Friend agree that in considering the question about the fall from 13th to 18th, we must consider which countries have grown fastest in that league table? Have not the countries that have the same industrial infrastructure as us, such as France and Germany, grown more slowly? The countries that have grown fastest are those such as Singapore and Hong Kong, which have deregulated economies and low taxes—things that are far removed from the Labour party's understanding.

Mr. Sykes: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I first went to Singapore in 1974. I remember leaving cold, socialist England as it then was—Harold Wilson had just got back into power. Singapore was then the fifth biggest port in the world; now it is the biggest. That is a good example of how the Asian economies have driven forward.

I was explaining about the wonderful business and manufacturing in my constituency. Whitby Seafoods is another example of innovative products. It came to Whitby only a short time ago and is now one of Whitby's largest employers and sells its products across the United Kingdom. It is doing so well because the business climate in the United Kingdom is conducive to that. There is no minimum wage or social chapter.

One large company in my constituency could not afford to build a factory in France because of the social chapter and the minimum wage. It doubled its production line in Scarborough, much to the benefit of the people who work in the factory. If one looks out to sea in my constituency when driving up the coast, one sees ferries going at about 10 mph. They come from Sunderland. They are full of Nissan cars and are on their way to Europort. Who would have said 10 years ago that Nissan would be in Britain? It has come to Britain because we have a business climate in which it can thrive. It will continue to thrive as long as there is no social chapter, no minimum wage and, most of all, no Labour Government.

My friends and colleagues who run firms in Europe are fed up with the social chapter and the minimum wage. Their companies pursue policies that are designed to minimise the employment of human beings because once they take people on, they cannot get rid of them. That is why unemployment is so high in Europe. The closing years of the 20th century will magnify how profoundly misguided are Europe's policies of the social chapter and minimum wage. Those policies and the Labour party are fused like Siamese twins. What Europe needs is a good old dose of Tory Anglo-Saxon economic liberalism, and that is what we shall get after the next general election.

8.49 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I apologise for being absent from the Chamber for a fair part of this debate: I was attending the Select Committee on the Treasury.

The background to the debate is the disastrous failure of Conservative economic policy in the past 15 years. I was sharply reminded of that failure at the weekend when dealing with constituents and, in particular, when responding to a letter from a couple who bought what they described as their "dream home" for £80,000 in 1989, shortly before the sharp jump in interest rates.

Once the rates went up, they could not keep up the increased repayments and the house was repossessed in 1991. The mortgage company sold it for £45,000. The balance, plus interest and other charges left the couple with a debt of £64,000 by August 1995 and they are struggling to pay it off with monthly payments. Both have been employed throughout the period. Their letter bears relaying to the House. They say:

"This is a devastating plea which we are bringing to your attention because we have come to a point where we feel helpless."

As I said, their house was repossessed in 1991, when the interest rate increased dramatically. They continue:

"Since then, we have been suffering and enduring . . . financial problems and all sorts of difficulties especially between ourselves . . . We are living in a very bad nightmare, our social life as well as family life has been destroyed because we always blame each other for what happened. We are even scared to have another child because its too demanding.

However, you are surely aware that thousands of couples like us who had been hit by that disaster are still suffering and living in a silent trauma. So many families have split and so many people have stopped working deliberately to get away. We are honest people trying hard to keep ourselves together and survive, but believe me Sir, its very hard indeed . . . we can make no saving for our son's future."

Is that fair? They go on to make a plea—it is a novel suggestion—that funds from the national lottery be used to tackle housing debts and so end the nightmare that they are suffering with tens of thousands like them.

That is the reality of the Government's management of the economy. Behind the self-congratulation in the Government motion, 1,000 people a week are having their homes repossessed—one third of a million have suffered that fate—and there are still 1.7 million people in negative equity. The reason is that the Government have made a hash of it in the past 17 years and everyone is paying the price.

The most grievous indictment of the Government's management of the economy has been the explosion of inequality in the past 17 years. Last year, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded its 15-month inquiry into income and wealth in Britain. Its three key findings ought to have rung alarm bells for the Government. First, income inequality grew between 1977 and 1990 to a higher level than at any time since the war. Secondly, income inequality increased faster in Britain than in any other industrialised country except New Zealand and, thirdly, the poorest 20 to 30 per cent. in Britain failed to benefit from economic growth in any way after 1979, unlike in any other post-war period.

Mr. Sykes: If what the hon. Gentleman says is true, what does the Labour party propose to do about it and what does he propose? Would he put up higher rate tax for so-called rich people and at what rate would that tax begin?

Mr. Timms: I am making a critique of the Government's policy and I intend to deal in some detail with tax. I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would wait until I get to that subject.

The effects of what I am describing are profound. Families are stretched as both parents are forced to work long hours, giving them less time for their children. Youngsters in low-income families are being denied the network of community support that they need to supplement their parents' primary role.

The Rowntree report also exposes a disturbing racial dimension, finding that the greater risk of poverty and low education qualifications among some of the ethnic minority groups is likely to exacerbate inequality. The report shows, with shocking clarity, how that growing inequality tears at the fabric of our nation.

The cohesiveness of society is not just an altruistic aspiration, but an economic necessity. If we are to function as a modern economy in the new millennium, we will need a flexible and secure work force, who are highly skilled and able to cope with the ebb and flow of the global market. We need a population who feel that they have a stake in Britain, not what we have at the moment—a society in which the poorer members are being driven into permanent poverty and most of the rest are faced with the insecurity of knowing that they could be the next to fall.

The hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) has worked hard on the issue of benefit hostels on behalf of some of his constituents. We are both members of the Standing Committee that is considering the Housing Bill and he has raised that issue with other members of that Committee. He should be asking himself why so many people have to live in such hostels. It is not merely the victims of what I have been describing who suffer, but the rest of the community as well. His constituents in Scarborough, whose cause he has properly taken up with great vigour, are suffering because of what Government economic policy has done to the country and particularly to the least well-off. Everyone is faced with insecurity and knows that they could be the next to fall.

The Rowntree report refers to the tax system and shows that inequality in post-tax incomes has grown as fast as that in pre-tax incomes. In other words, the tax system has done nothing to stop the widening gap between rich and poor. There used to be agreement on both sides of the House that the tax system should effect some redistribution from the richest to the poorest, but the system is failing us in that regard and it is failing Britain.

Mr. Deva: Concern for the less well-off and about how to improve their circumstances is very laudable, but would the hon. Gentleman move on from his critique and tell the House whether his solution is less borrowing or an increase in higher rate taxes? What are his policies?

Mr. Timms: I am dealing with the Government's economic policies, which are the subject of the motion, and will continue to do so. I want to concentrate on the Government's intentions for inheritance tax. The plan that has been unveiled to abolish inheritance tax epitomises the Government's abandonment of the one-nation ideal for a lurch to the right.

There was a time when the Prime Minister's aspirations were for a classless society, but that feels like a long time ago. We have come a long way since the Prime Minister could speak in those terms. Today, the vision that he holds out is of a measure that can only reinforce the inherited privileges that remain as entrenched as ever in the Britain of the late 1990s.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has frequently assessed inheritance tax and recently published an interesting report, which I commend to hon. Members. It is entitled,

"Two nations? The inheritance of poverty and affluence"

and illustrates the extent to which people's income and social class is determined by that of their parents. The Prime Minister once said that he wanted a classless society. It shows the extent to which he has failed in that aspiration and the proposed abolition of inheritance tax suggests that he has abandoned it altogether.

The report is based on the national child development study, which tracks the lives of a group of more than 3,000 people born in a single week in 1958. A series of studies has been carried out over nearly 40 years. Those people entered their 20s at about the time the Conservative party entered Government in 1979.

The report reveals, first, the intergenerational transmission of poverty through unemployment. Those people raised against a backdrop of unemployment are about twice as likely as the population in general to end up with a substantial history of unemployment. Secondly, the sons of managerial and professional families are almost three times as likely to end up in managerial and professional occupations as the sons of semi-skilled and unskilled fathers. Thirdly, sons of managerial and professional families are less than one third as likely to end up in semi-skilled and unskilled groups.

According to the report, the son of a father in the top 20 per cent. income bracket is more than three times as likely to end up in the top 20 per cent. income bracket as in the bottom 20 per cent. bracket. More than one third of

[Mr. Timms]

sons in the top 20 per cent. income bracket had fathers in the same bracket, while only one in 10 had fathers with incomes in the lower bracket. The effect is even stronger in top 10 per cent. income bracket.

Mr. Sykes: How does the hon. Gentleman account for Essex man? None of the survey—which must have been conducted at the expense of the taxpayer by God knows whom—relates to real life. Obviously people who are wealthier should be able to pass their goods and services down to the next generation, but how does the hon. Gentleman explain Essex man and the increase in videos, holidays abroad and wealth that has affected everyone in Britain? The people who conducted the survey must be living on a different plant.

Mr. Timms: I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments. The Institute for Fiscal Studies is an extremely reputable body. I shall gladly send a copy of the report to the hon. Gentleman as it makes thought-provoking reading. He should pay close attention to it as it shows the extent to which affluence is inherited in Britain today.

The key factor influencing prosperity is not merit or ability, but parental income. Those social rigidities are not only unfair, but make us all poorer. That is the reality of Britain in 1996, yet the Prime Minister who said that he wanted a classless society proposes to make matters even worse by abolishing inheritance tax. The Chancellor—on this and the other taxes that we discussed earlier—appears to be less enthusiastic about that prospect, and one can only hope that he prevails.

Abolishing inheritance tax would cost £1.6 billion a year. That is not far short of the cost of taking a penny off income tax. Only about 3 per cent. of the 600,000 estates transferred each year pay inheritance tax at the current threshold and the benefits of scrapping inheritance tax would be massively, disproportionately and overwhelmingly concentrated on those who are best off. That exposes what really drives the modern Conservative party.

An analysis of the 1992 figures shows that 30 per cent. of the handout from abolishing inheritance tax would go to 3 per cent. of the estates—those valued at more than £1 million. In 1994, the top 10 wills were worth £179 million, so with inheritance tax at 40 per cent. their beneficiaries would have gained up to £72 million from its abolition. Nearly 5 per cent. of the handout from scrapping inheritance tax would have gone to the largest 10 out of 600,000 estates of extremely wealthy people.

Their preoccupation with giving money to the rich exemplifies the Government at their worse. It is doing terrible damage and leading to the benefit hostels about which the hon. Member for Scarborough said so much. At the same time, we are forcing asylum seekers into penury, closing hospitals and leaving schools in chronic disrepair. We are forcing increasing numbers of people to choose private sector solutions for health and education so we are further exacerbating the divisions in our society which are the worst problem that most threatens the well-being of Britain as we approach the millennium. Those divisions are a blight.

There is not the slightest chance of Britain being a nation at ease with itself while inequality continues to worsen and the Government concentrate on finding ways to make rich people richer, leaving the rest struggling, anxious and insecure. Inheritance tax is criticised—with some justification—because people often avoid paying it. However, as *The Economist* pointed out last summer, that is an argument for making it work better, not for scrapping it. There are strong arguments for changing the nature of inheritance tax and making it a tax on those who receive the inheritance rather than on the estate that provides it. However, scrapping it altogether would be a dreadful and a regressive move.

Why should people pay tax on their earnings if there is no tax on inheritance? Why should someone who earns £100 pay £25 or £40 in tax, while someone who receives £100 as a gift or an inheritance pays no tax? Why does the Prime Minister hold that up as something to which the nation should aspire? If people could accumulate large sums in inheritance tax free, giving tax advantages to unearned income over earned income would undermine work incentives and damage the prospects of having the innovative, hard-working and highly motivated work force on which our future prosperity depends.

Mr. Sykes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for indulging me yet again. The inheritance tax threshold is currently £154,000. Would a Labour Government lower or increase it?

Mr. Timms: I do not think that the threshold should be lowered and it has not been uprated in line with inflation in recent years. I am concerned about the enormous handouts to those with the biggest estates and the huge sums of money from which they would benefit if inheritance tax were abolished. I think that there is a case for raising the threshold somewhat—I do not argue with that, if it is the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. It may be that the very rich support the Conservative party, but that is not a good enough reason to hand them hundreds of millions of pounds a year by abolishing inheritance tax, as Conservative Members seem to propose.

I have not spoken about capital gains tax and I do not intend to comment on it at length—although there was an exchange about it earlier. That situation is not dissimilar to inheritance tax: abolishing capital gains tax would cost billions of pounds, the bulk of the benefit would be concentrated on a tiny handful of people, and it would take funds from the public services on which the cohesion of our society depends.

We want to achieve cohesive communities, a flexible, highly skilled work force and a modern economy that benefits from the talents of all people. However, we are becoming increasingly divided. There are more and more people who have never worked and who have no prospect of working. The Government are walking away from what needs to be done to put matters right. Abolishing inheritance tax can only make things worse: huge handouts to a small number of people while inequality worsens further. The resources for public services, such as education, would be reduced even more, divisions would deepen and cohesion would be undermined. We would all suffer as a result—and we have suffered too much already.

9.7 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): I am conscious of the time, so I shall be brief. The country would pay a heavy inheritance tax if the Labour party

were to take office. However, if it won an election, Labour would inherit the best economic circumstances seen in this country for the past 50 years.

I am very privileged to represent the constituency of Brentford and Isleworth, where there are some extraordinarily good multinational and national companies. Along the A4 is a stretch of road called the golden mile and in that area I am proud to represent Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd., Bull Information Systems Ltd., SmithKline Beecham plc, Gillette Industries plc and many other international companies, including the British Standards Institution.

In the past three years, the rate of unemployment in my constituency has decreased by 100 per cent. and some 3,500 new jobs have been created in the past two years. That is a proud record, for which we commend the Government. Some 770,000 new jobs have been created since 1992—more than in the entire European Union. Inward investment alone has created about 40,000 jobs in this country.

When I listen to the Opposition talk about the British economy, sometimes it crosses my mind that they are talking about a different country from the one that I know. The Opposition talk about the country as they wish it to be, not the country that it is now. Today, we have one of the lowest inflation rates of any country in the world for the past 50 years. Our interest rates and growth are higher than in any other country in Europe. All those facts should be supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. We need to talk Britain up, not talk it down. The trouble with the Opposition is that they are constantly trying to talk this country down when we need to create more jobs and to attract more investment and more money so that we can compete internationally.

I shall spend a few minutes describing what might be the result of Labour's economic policies. We know very little about the Labour party's policies. This evening, we have tried to elicit its policies from Labour Members, but either they do not know because they do not have any policies or they will not tell us. It is, therefore, difficult for us to examine the policies in detail, but vignettes of the Opposition's ideas are revealed occasionally, and we have heard about endogenous growth theory.

If we ask about the endogenous growth theory that the Opposition have talked so long and loud about, we come to some fundamental differences. Let us never believe that the economic policies of the Conservative party are the same as the economic policies of the so-called new Labour party. They are not. The new Labour party has nothing new about it. Its economic policies are as fundamentally different from a capitalist, social market, free enterprise economy as one could imagine. Endogenous growth theory, in other words, is another way to manage the economy—not by commanding the heights of the economy as the late Tony Crosland tried to do, but by managing relationships.

The Opposition would set about managing the relationships between suppliers, producers, retailers, distributors and marketers. They would try to manage the economy by putting a civil servant into every boardroom in every company. That is as fundamental a difference on intervention as one could imagine. It is almost Marxist in outlook. It implies that the Government, civil servants and officials know best how to manage the economy by insisting, cajoling—even possibly forcing—companies to take investment decisions for the good of the country as the Government and officials see it.

Mr. Sykes: Civil servants in Whitehall making decisions would be bad enough, but what about shop stewards? The Opposition would put shop stewards left, right and centre—everywhere.

Mr. Deva: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. If we add the endogenous growth theory to the idea of a stakeholding economy, we would find that the trade unions would come back into decision making.

We would find that the national enterprise board and all the other people in the Department of Trade and Industry would return to the boardrooms of every company and tell company directors where they should be investing their money. The officials would tell the company directors not to buy a new plant, but to invest their money in something else. That is what new Labour is about and there is nothing new about it. It is old Marxist Labour.

9.13 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): When I was preparing for this debate, I drew inspiration from the current edition of the *New Statesman and Society* and, in particular, from a telling analysis by Lord Desai, the former Opposition spokesman in the other place. His analysis is very different from the gloomy one put forward by so many Opposition Members tonight. He says that "the story all round" on the economy is positive, and that inflation is likely to "remain within" its target range in 1996, "dipping below 2.5 per cent." He notes that unemployment has fallen every month since March 1993 and now

"appears to be falling faster than it was last year."

Manufacturing employment, on a downward trend since 1966, is now increasing once more and personal incomes are set to rise. In summary, he concludes that it would be foolish to count on the economic position helping Labour. Having listened to some Opposition Members, I think that Lord Desai is perhaps underestimating the extent to which the economic debate favours the Government rather than their political adversaries.

I listened with great care to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms), who spoke with characteristic passion and concern for the poor in society. Throughout his contribution, however, I heard no constructive Labour party alternative to the policies that the Government are pursuing. That is hardly surprising. After all, when we last debated economic matters, on the annual report presented by the Government on the domestic economy to the European Commission, the shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), was so confused that he strayed into the wrong Lobby by mistake and voted against his party's policy and against the United Kingdom's obligations under the treaty of Rome. We still have not heard an explanation. It may have been a deliberate act, or it may have been that the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) was not available to lend the hon. Gentleman a guiding hand. Perhaps the hon. Member for Oxford, East has already written a letter of abject apology to President Santer and has been assured by the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)—

Mr. Sykes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lidington: I shall press on because of the time constraint.

[Mr. Lidington]

The outlook for the immediate future is certainly encouraging. The Government are entitled to take credit for that. The long-term trends, however, undoubtedly present serious challenges. The twin pressures of international competition and computer technology will not disappear. Those pressures are responsible for many of the difficulties experienced by individual firms and families, to which hon. Members on both sides of the House have alluded.

We do not have to be uncritical admirers of Correlli Barnett's thesis about Britain's economic history to appreciate the risks of a country or continent that tries to live beyond its means or which seeks to pay for social policies that it cannot generate the wealth to finance properly. The great risk for Europe—not only the United Kingdom—is stagnation, or what is termed by the pundits Eurosclerosis, which would destroy our ability as a continent to generate new jobs at a time when we face fearsome competition from the far east and from the American continent.

It is depressing that Labour Members have failed to acknowledge global pressures along with their uncritical acceptance of the regulatory approach that is peddled in Brussels, which has damaged employment prospects and blighted the economies of some of our continental neighbours. That approach would have the same consequences in this country if the Labour party were ever to get its hands on the levers of economic power.

The Government can point to many initiatives that have helped to provide jobs and to bring investment to the United Kingdom. Through our privatisation policies we have ensured that British firms and foreign firms investing here have lower charges for telecommunications and for fuel than they would have had under the old nationalised regime. They face lower charges than those that apply in many international competitor countries.

Our non-wage labour costs remain lower here than in most of our continental competitor countries due to the Government's policy of keeping regulations and business taxes to the bare minimum.

We should concentrate our attention now on what my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) described as investment in human capital. I have been heartened to see in my constituency how modern apprenticeships are being valued both by the providers of that training and by the employers who take on the trainees after graduation. I was encouraged, too, to see how general national vocational qualifications are beginning, at last, to provide the stratum of technical pre-vocational education that has been lacking in this country for a century and which, until the lifetime of this Government, we had never got around to dealing with adequately.

I hope that the Dearing review, which will be reported before long, will carry those developments further. In my view, it is not just a matter of money. If one studies the figures in publications such as "Social Trends", one will see that we compare favourably with most of our competitor countries in terms of spending per head. The key question is how to deliver higher standards in primary education so that we avoid having to take remedial measures later, and in training and university education, too.

I am confident that if we get that right we can build on the successes that Lord Desai recognised and bring a bright future for later generations.

9.20 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): For a debate that was called by the Government, speeches from Conservative Members fell flat, just as the Chancellor's speech did. We were waiting to hear what great, new initiative of Government policy would be announced. Yet there was no announcement. As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) pointed out, there were no new ideas from Conservative Members, although the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) sought to get Treasury Ministers to commit themselves to a flat tax. I look forward to hearing, when the President of the Board of Trade replies, whether they will consider the hon. Gentleman's proposal. That was the only new idea that we heard.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) took comfort from forecasts in *The Economist*, which, he said, were exceeded only by those for Australia. I do not know whether he followed the news over the weekend and learnt the right lessons from Australia. His hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) clearly had, and said that the results from Spain and Australia had set a trend. I am not sure that he had the trend exactly right. The correct parallel to draw with this country is that long-established Governments who had made significant changes to their country were ejected from office by an insecure electorate who believed that it was time for a change.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), in a thoughtful speech, highlighted the nature of global competition, the constraints on national monetary and fiscal policy, and the over-arching importance, where resources and capital are mobile in today's world, of investing in what he called "human capital" and what we would call people. That is pretty much the argument that the Labour party has made. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), in an excellent speech and with great vigour did precisely that and spelt out proposals to raise education standards and skill levels and to stimulate innovation. The hon. Member for Carshalton got his answer there.

My hon. Friends the Members for Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for Huddersfield rightly drew our attention to the importance of manufacturing industry, not, as is sometimes misrepresented by Conservative Members, instead of the service sector but as an essential complement to it, because in a essential economy the health of one depends on the other. That is the point that my hon. Friends were making.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) pointed out how alarming it is that, despite the fall in inflation, Britain has had low investment, and that despite a huge devaluation there are pressures on the balance of payments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) rightly drew attention to the importance of training and motivating young people, because it is they who are suffering most from the insecurity that is afflicting the labour market. How indefensible not only that the Government are abolishing the community action programme but that the Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot even remember the name of the projects that he supposes will replace it.

Anyone reading the motion must wonder why people feel so insecure—why only 20 per cent. of the public have any confidence in the Government's economic policies.

We know the answer given by the President of the Board of Trade: "It is all in the mind". What he actually said—at a briefing during the CBI conference in Birmingham in November—was:

"What I am saying is that job insecurity is a state of mind."

Because it is out of touch, the Conservative party does not understand what people feel like when they have experienced the sharpest fall in living standards for 14 years, as they did last year; when they have had two years of appalling take-home pay; and when, in place of the year-on-year tax cuts that they were promised—indeed, in the last Conservative party manifesto the present Chief Secretary promised a full 5p off tax—they have been hammered with year-on-year tax rises.

Under the present Government, 400,000 people have had their homes repossessed, and many more teeter on the brink. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfermline, East (Mr. Brown) pointed out, 8.5 million people have experienced a spell of unemployment since 1992. The Conservatives, of course, said that that was a price worth paying. Under the Conservatives, who promised to cut crime, the crime rate has doubled, with incalculable human costs and financial costs of £17 billion a year. Is it any wonder that people who have experienced all that feel betrayed by the Government? Is it any wonder that they feel misled by the Conservatives—misled at the election, misled in Parliament and misled by the Budget? They have been betrayed by a Government who keep promising one thing and doing another.

Mr. Forman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courteous reference to my speech. That proves that he listened to what some Conservative Members said.

May I put to the hon. Gentleman the point that I would have put to his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) if he had had the courtesy to give way to me? The Labour amendment makes much play of "job insecurity". As I said in my speech, that affects all our constituencies in one way or another; but I should like to know, here and now, what policies the hon. Gentleman's party proposes to deal with the real issues of job insecurity—bearing in mind that its causes have much to do with global markets and technological developments.

Mr. Smith: We keep telling Conservative Members what policies are needed to deal with job insecurity, and to make our economy prosperous and successful. We need an investment strategy to increase productivity and profitable investment; we need the policies for education and training, to improve skill levels and skill standards, to which my hon. Friends have referred; and we need the "welfare to work" proposals that we have spelt out, which would enable us to start to provide employment for the young and long-term unemployed.

The claims in the motion do not square with people's experience, or with the facts. It refers to "sustainable growth". Since the Government came to office, the average annual growth rate—including that resulting from North sea oil—has been 1.9 per cent. That is the worst growth rate since the second world war. The United Kingdom is 10th out of 15 countries in the European growth league, and growth has been slowing for two years.

The Government also boast about their record on inflation. Only last week, the latest Eurostat figures showed that the UK had come 11th out of 14 European countries in the inflation league. Since 1979, Britain has had a worse inflation record than any other industrial nation except Italy. No wonder the Governor of the Bank of England recently said:

"across the Group of Seven we're towards the bottom of the League."

The motion also has the nerve to refer to "Government borrowing coming down". Even on the optimistic growth forecast for this year in the Red Book, the Chancellor proposes to borrow twice as much between now and the end of the decade as he said that he would borrow just a year ago—an extra £39 billion between now and the millennium.

No one will be fooled by the Government's claims about the state of public finances. The burden of public debt has increased by 40 per cent. in real terms since the Tories came into office. Despite all the North sea oil and all the privatisation receipts, every person in work is carrying their share of the national debt—£12,500. Under the Tories, only £1 in every £16 of public spending goes into investment, whereas £1 in every £8 went into investment under Labour. Interest payments on the debt alone are set to increase from £96 billion in the first half of this decade to £115 billion in the second half.

Mr. Couchman: How does the hon. Gentleman explain the Labour party's most recent period in Government, when the value of our money halved in five years, between 1974 and 1979, and the value of the debt doubled?

Mr. Smith: That Labour Government had to deal with a quadrupling of oil prices, and with the type of global conditions with which this Government have never had to contend. We talk about public debt and the reasons for it. Unemployment is one reason, and it is now more than double the level it was when Labour left office. The average number of unemployed people under this Government is 1.5 million more than it was under that Labour Government. That is the £20 billion cost of unemployment, which is part of the price of the economic failure that the Conservatives have inflicted on us.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will my hon. Friend confirm that when the Labour party came to power, in 1974, inflation was running at 13 per cent. and rising, and that when they left office, in 1979, it was 9 per cent. and falling?

Mr. Smith: I confirm that. I also point out that it was under this Conservative Government that inflation reached no less than 22 per cent. They should not mention inflation in their motion.

The last claim in the Government motion is about employment. What they do not mention, of course, is the brutal and undeniable fact that unemployment has more than doubled, at a cost of £20,000 million a year, under this Government. On job generation, the Tories' record in this country since 1979 has been the worst of all the European economies, and there are a million fewer people in jobs now than there were when the current Prime Minister took office.

It is interesting that even this Government, even in such a misleading motion as this one, did not dare to make any claims about investments. We discover why that is when

[Mr. Smith]

we examine the figures. It is because Britain's share of European investment has fallen under this Government. In the present recovery, such as it is, manufacturing investment is alarmingly low—barely 1 per cent. above its depths in the recession of early 1992. At the same stage after the 1991 recession, investment had recovered by 21 per cent. At the same stage after the 1975 recession, it had recovered by 25 per cent., and yet we have just seen the sharpest quarterly fall in manufacturing investment for five years. It is no wonder that Treasury Ministers did not mention investment in their motion.

Despite Conservative Members' understandable desperation to talk up their economic record, the truth will out. The big picture is that the Government have an appalling record on investment, skills, education and the quality of our infrastructure. They sold off the family silver like there was no tomorrow, and now they are struggling to compensate for all their boom-bust macro-economic mismanagement in the years since 1979.

Britain's record under the Tories is one of a low-growth, low-investment and high-unemployment economy. The tendency has been to increase productivity by shedding jobs, to maintain competitiveness by devaluing the currency and to fund ever increasing transfer payments by cutting public investment.

Public spending goes ever more towards paying the price of economic and social failure, ever less towards investment for success. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East pointed out, the result is that Britain is more divided now than at any time this century—with incalculable consequences for our social fabric and economic well-being.

Taken together, all this goes to show why Britain has gone down the world prosperity league to 18th place, and why it is only the 10th richest country in the European Union. It also explains why the Chancellor can convince so few of his colleagues of Britain's ability to hold its own in an economic and monetary union. These are the facts which all the Chancellor's knockabout propaganda cannot disguise.

From time to time, however, the Chancellor does give the game away. Such a revealing moment came in a "Today" interview a few weeks ago, when he let slip the following:

> "In the union of national states that Europe is, what I want Britain to be is the most powerful economic force inside that Union . . . We have obviously a long way to go."

That certainly blows out of the water all the Government's claims about Britain being the enterprise centre of Europe.

Quite apart from anything else, enterprise centres need confident entrepreneurs. But business is far from confident about the economic position and prospects. The most recent Forum of Private Business survey showed that only a minority of businesses are expanding—38 per cent. of the total. As the summary of the survey said:

> "The latest small reduction in interest rates was a welcome move, but the Forum of Private Business is still concerned that it may be insufficient to reverse the current trend of a decline in the number of expanding businesses."

Similarly, the latest CBI small and medium enterprises survey reported a virtual standstill in orders over the four months to the end of January, and said that overall growth was approaching a three-year low. And the main CBI quarterly survey showed manufacturing orders down for the first time in three years, employment falling at its sharpest rate since July 1994, and business confidence still falling.

Yesterday's *Sunday Times* Coopers and Lybrand survey of middle-market companies warned of a significant slowdown ahead. The fact is that the climate of confidence necessary for business will not be created by the recent Budget, which did nothing on capital allowances and nothing to encourage investment for the longer term, which increased the VAT threshold by half the rate of inflation only, and which increased business rates by 5 per cent. more than the rate of inflation.

Businesses, like people, can no longer trust what the Government say. They cannot trust the Government's claims about the past or their promises for the future. They certainly cannot rely on their forecasts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East pointed out, year after year since 1990 the Government's business investment forecasts have turned out to exceed what actually happens. The Bank of England forecasters are just as badly let down by the Government. Their February inflation report states that economic growth since the end of 1994 has been slower than at first thought. Net exports were weaker than expected; investment growth was not as fast as projected. And the high point of economic achievement is represented by the statement that

> "much of the increase in consumption was in spending on the National Lottery".

Is that really what the country has come to? Our economic success apparently owes more to gambling than to manufacturing investment or investment in infrastructure.

The Government's record in no way justifies the smug, self-congratulatory complacency of their motion. That, of course, is why we tabled our amendment. If the Government claim everything is so wonderful, let them explain why they have broken all their tax promises, why take-home pay has fallen two years in succession, why 8.5 million people have experienced Tory unemployment since 1992, why investment is so low, why public borrowing is so high, why we have one of the worst inflation records in Europe and why long-term interest rates are still one quarter higher than those in Germany.

Where British firms and their employees are doing well, we are the first to applaud them because they are succeeding despite the Government's economic policy, rather than because of it. Britain needs the strategy for investment, skills and infrastructure that Labour is calling for. We need the welfare-to-work policies that we have spelt out to remove people from benefit and to provide them with jobs. We need partnership so that people pull together for a strong economy and a fair society.

The mistake that Conservative Members make in their motion is that they judge Britain's economic prospects not against what the country is capable of, but against the dismal record for which they are responsible. When this country has fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league and is 24th on investment and 35th on education, when it has the lowest share of world trade this century, when German and American workers have 60 per cent. more plant and equipment than British workers, when job insecurity here is rife, living standards are running 25 per cent. behind the core of Europe and Conservative Members say they are satisfied, we say theirs is not the enterprise centre of Europe, but the complacency capital of the world. Britain can do better—much better—than that and, with Labour, it will.

9.41 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I have no doubt that the Government were right to hold this important debate on the economy, if only so that we could hear the excellent speeches of Conservative Members. In particular, my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) drew attention to the rise of the Asian economies and rightly pointed out that, for us, they are not so much a threat as an opportunity. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) spoke of the dramatically improved industrial relations that we are experiencing and of the need to press further ahead with our deregulation policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) talked about Governments of all complexions having less ability to influence most issues than we sometimes pretend. His remarks on job insecurity were far more sensitive than those of Labour Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) talked knowledgeably about small businesses' interests and the benefits of lower tax rates. In an eloquent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) spoke of the benefits of inward investment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) spoke knowledgeably of the Government's taxation changes and my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) made a telling speech on the damage done to our nation's economy by the winter of discontent and of the great benefits that have derived from our privatisation programme. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) prayed in aid the *New Statesman and Society* and spoke of the need to invest more in human capital. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) pointed out that all the Labour party has done today—again—is to talk Britain down.

I am sorry that I was out of the Chamber and missed the speech of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), but I shall read it with great care in *Hansard* tomorrow. I was sorry to learn of the mine accident to which the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) drew the House's attention and I shall of course ensure that it is fully and properly investigated.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) made what I think can be described as a thoughtful speech and I found much in it with which to agree. He spoke of there being more convergence of party policy than we like to admit—certainly much more than the Labour Front Bench likes to admit. He spoke of wealth creation being central and said that he wanted more manufacturing. Unfortunately, he spoiled it all by praising the United States of America and asking why we could not be more like them when, as a proportion of GDP, we are almost identical in terms of the level of manufacturing.

Opposition Back Benchers were more in touch with reality than their Front-Bench colleagues. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer spelled out the extremely favourable economic circumstances that face the United Kingdom. For the benefit of newcomers to the debate and of the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) I shall précis my right hon. and learned Friend's speech and repeat some of his important points.

We will soon be entering our fifth year of a healthy and sustained economic recovery based on sound public finances and permanently low inflation. All the economic fundamentals are in place to ensure that that continues. Total underlying exports have risen by almost a third since the beginning of the recovery and they continue to rise. Unemployment has fallen by more than 750,000 since the beginning of the recovery; at below 8 per cent., it is at its lowest for five years. Meanwhile, 600,000 more people are in work than at the end of the recession. Perhaps most impressive is the fact that inflation has been below 4 per cent. for more than three years—something we have not experienced in the United Kingdom for almost 50 years.

We are just getting used to low inflation. Our national record on inflation since the war has, at times, been less than impressive. That is why we adopted the current inflation target and, more important, stuck to it. The underlying rate of inflation has averaged just 2.6 per cent. since we adopted the target in 1992, compared with an average rate of 6.5 per cent. in the 1980s and 13 per cent. in the 1970s. Low inflation is vital to providing the confidence to invest in the future. It is the best way to encourage business men and investors to take the long-term view.

I am glad to note that many of our businesses are responding. Manufacturing investment has risen by 6.5 per cent. in each of the past two years. What matters is the long term, not the short-term fluctuations of a notoriously volatile measure, with which Labour Members are so bedazzled. It is a pity that the Opposition will not spell out any of their targets, whether for inflation, investment or any of the other issues that really matter for the management of the economy.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I obviously agree with the right hon. Gentleman that permanently low inflation is a desirable objective. Is he aware of a report published on Friday by the Library which shows that Britain is the fourth worst performer on inflation in the European Union and that we are on course to fail the Maastricht inflation criteria? How, in his opinion, can the Government ensure that we do qualify and that we raise ourselves to near the top of the European Union average?

Mr. Lang: Our inflation rate is low, but the hon. Gentleman must recognise that all the inflation rates in the European economies are relatively close. What is significant is that, compared with the appalling record of the last Labour Government, under whom the cost of living doubled, Britain's record has improved dramatically in recent years—as it did in the 1980s.

For the benefit of the Opposition, I shall spell out what a commitment to the long-term health of the United Kingdom economy means in practice. Since 1979, overall investment has risen faster in this country than in any other major European economy. What is more, it has risen six times faster than it did under the last Labour Government. Investment in plant and machinery has risen by more than 50 per cent. and business investment has risen by more than a third. The Confederation of British Industry has reported investment intentions at their highest level for six years.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) spoke about job insecurity and tried to distort and misquote what I have said on the subject. I emphasise, as I have previously, that job insecurity exists, and we must take that into account. People feel a sense of anxiety about

[Mr. Lang]

future employment. However, the reality is that, by creating a flexible labour market, as we are doing, we shall be best prepared to create the jobs and increased employment that will help to remove the sense of insecurity.

The 1994 labour force survey showed that three quarters of men in employment had been with the same employer for more than two years—the same figure as 10 and 20 years ago. The change is nothing like as dramatic as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East suggested. Another survey of males between 30 and 49 showed that 44 per cent. had been in the same job for at least 10 years. Further research shows that, of those in jobs for five to 10 years, 80 per cent. will still be there in five years and most of those who move will go to better jobs. The hon. Gentleman drew attention to the Juvos database, which shows that the number going through unemployment are doing so for shorter periods. Half of those who claim unemployment benefit leave the count in three months and two thirds leave in six months.

The biggest cause of insecurity is unemployment. The fact that unemployment has fallen for two and a half years and is down by almost 200,000 in the past year alone is a considerable boost to the increase in a sense of security. At below 8 per cent., unemployment is more than two percentage points below the European average, three points lower than in France, four points lower than in Italy and almost 14 points lower than in Spain. Britain has more of its people in work and fewer out of work than any other major European country.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Is the President of the Board of Trade not concerned that, of the 25 million people employed in Britain, 6 million are in part-time employment? Only 19 million people are keeping an economy of 56 million people going. Full-time employment is being substituted by part-time, low-paid employment. Is he proud of that?

Mr. Lang: The vast majority of people in part-time employment are in it because that is the kind of employment that they want. The hon. Gentleman will find that, although youth unemployment in Britain is too high—almost 16 per cent.—in France it is almost 28 per cent., in Italy it is 36 per cent. and in Spain it is 38 per cent. In Britain, unemployment among women is 7 per cent., in France it is almost double that at almost 14 per cent., in Italy it is 17.5 per cent. and in Spain it is more than 29 per cent. Almost every comparison that one can find shows that enormous progress has been made in the United Kingdom compared with European Union countries in recent years.

However, we need greater flexibility in employment. It is only by pursuing the Government's flexible labour market policies that we will create more jobs and thus greater job security.

Mr. Andrew Smith: If the news about unemployment is all so good, why are more than 1 million fewer people in employment than when his right hon. Friend became Prime Minister? Is that not a true indictment of the Government's unemployment record?

Mr. Lang: It is to the credit of our employment measures that 68 per cent. of the eligible population in the United Kingdom are in work, which is more than any other comparable country in the EU. The point that I was making is that our flexible labour market policies are creating jobs and thus creating more job security. The Opposition's policies include the national minimum wage and the social chapter, which would destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs. That is no way to create job security. The rigidity that would come in with the stakeholder policy—the unions would stake out their share of power and fence in the economy—would result in a loss of jobs and a lack of confidence.

The deputy leader of the Labour party—the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—said of the national minimum wage on London Weekend Television:

"I knew that the consequences were that there'd be some shake-out, any silly fool knew that".

From their own mouths, Labour's policies stand condemned. The only fools left are those in the right hon. Gentleman's party, who would pursue policies that they know would destroy jobs, not create them.

What are the Labour party's policies? We listened in vain today. We hoped that we might hear more about the social chapter, which was introduced by the Labour party leader as just a set of principles. As soon as he discovered that it would be part of a solemn and binding treaty and an obligation and that most of its proposals, coming through under qualified majority voting, would be imposed on the United Kingdom, he suddenly announced that he would start picking and mixing, backing off, and trying to negotiate some special arrangements.

We know that Labour Members want a national minimum wage, but they will not tell us at what rate because they know that, at £4 an hour, it would cost us 900,000 jobs if only half the differentials were restored. We hear that they are backing off from their training levy. We hear that stakeholding, the big idea of just a couple of months ago, is now just a slogan. The sweetheart deal with BT to set up a cable network around Britain—a special favour for party advantage to a monopolist company—has suddenly been abandoned. All the Labour party's policies are quietly being put back in their box. Like the Cheshire cat in "Alice in Wonderland", piece by piece, Labour's policies are disappearing and all we are left with is the smile.

Labour has no inflation target and no borrowing target. There is just one commitment from the Labour party, and that is for a windfall tax. What an appalling message to send to the people of this country. A windfall tax is, by definition, a one-off tax. It cannot be spent 10 times over, as it has been by the Labour party, on successive policies. It would destroy investment plans, it would be unfair and capricious and it would penalise success. Nothing is more designed to destroy competition in the privatised utilities than such a tax.

Labour Members talk about investment. They should look at our inward investment record as well as the indigenous investment record. Since 1981, not only has our overall investment rate over the cycle been faster than that of every nation in the G7 group except Japan, but we have seen the world's verdict on Britain in inward investment. We see billions of pounds creating tens of thousands of jobs and bringing many new industries and new technologies to this country.

Just as it is with inward investment, so it is with outward investment and with trade. Britain is first and foremost a trading nation, out again on the world stage.

With 1 per cent. of the world's population, we are the fifth largest exporter. We export more per head than either Japan or the United States. We are selling more goods and services than ever before. Our underlying export volumes have risen by a third since the beginning of the recovery.

We will continue to work to expand global trade and to secure free trade through multilateral trade liberalisation. Just as we were a key player in the Uruguay round, so we shall seek to secure progress through the World Trade Organisation. We have identified areas in which we can develop the case for further open trade around the world at the meeting in Singapore.

Britain is now back on its feet again. The Labour party has made strenuous efforts to convince anyone who will listen that we have fallen behind many of our main competitors. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor pointed out Labour's deceit in seeking to project a table of world prosperity growth in which, it transpired, the slippage from 13th to 16th place took place not over the term of this Government, but in 1979-80, the first year of our period in office when, as everyone knows, we had a mess to clear up after the Labour Government.

What Labour Members have neglected to say is that our GDP per head is actually in line with that of the European Union and 10 per cent. ahead of that of Europe as a whole. They neglected to point out that our living standards have risen by 40 per cent. since 1979 compared with only 1 per cent. under the previous Labour Government. They neglected to point out that we have closed three quarters of the gap in manufacturing productivity against France and Germany since 1979, a gap that widened under the previous Labour Government.

Labour Members clearly enjoy league tables, so I shall give them some of my own. Between 1974 and 1979, of the major EU countries, the United Kingdom had the slowest GDP growth, the slowest growth in manufacturing productivity, the second slowest growth in manufacturing output and the slowest growth in private consumption. I reinforce what I say with a statement today by Mr. David Kern, the NatWest bank's chief economist. He says:

"Perceptions of UK underperformance are incorrect and need to be carefully reassessed".

Writing in the March issue of the group's "Economic and Financial Outlook", he then says:

"In terms of per capita GNP/GDP, the UK has narrowed the gap with its main West European and North American competitors; while growth has been higher in the UK than in comparable economies since the early 1980s."

He is right.

Since 1980, the United Kingdom has had the fastest growth in GDP, equal to that of Germany. It has had the fastest growth in productivity bar none, the fastest growth in manufacturing output, the fastest growth in investment and the fastest growth in private consumption, with the lowest tax burden.

Free enterprise and free trade are the twin pillars of our economic policy, and both are bringing growing success in an increasingly competitive global economy. Our policies—privatisation, liberalisation, deregulation and flexible labour markets—are increasingly finding favour around the world. We are in the mainstream—we are leading world opinion. We are punching above our weight as a nation because, under this Government, we are competitive again. Socialism is in retreat and decline all over the world. Last Saturday in Australia, the Labor party bit the dust. Yesterday in Spain, Labour bit the dust. Last year in France, Labour bit the dust. Socialism is irrelevant there, and irrelevant here. I urge the House to stick by the Government's policies, throw out the amendment and support the motion.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 242, Noes 288.

Division No. 66] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*

Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. George Mudie and Ms Janet Anderson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David

Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Simon Burns.

Amendment accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on the fundamental health of the British economy, as demonstrated by nearly four years of sustainable growth, the best inflation performance for almost 50 years, Government borrowing coming down, 29 months of falling unemployment and an increase of over half a million people in jobs since the recovery began, and recognises that this is a result of the Government's economic policies which are making the United Kingdom the enterprise centre of Europe.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Juries (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

AGRICULTURE

That the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) Scheme 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 230), dated 5th February 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th February, be approved.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

That the Central Manchester Development Corporation (Area and Constitution) Order 1996, dated 6th February 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

School Playing Fields, Castle Point

10.15 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): It is with regret that I present a petition to save Hadleigh school's playing fields. I should not have to save those fields, because the Liberal and Labour-controlled Essex county council could and should even now withdraw its claim to them.

The petition was raised by Hadleigh junior school and Hadleigh infants school to save their playing fields and was signed by more than 600 of my constituents. The petition reads:

"To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled, the Humble Petition of the residents of Hadleigh and the surrounding area, Sheweth that we, the undersigned, are deeply concerned that Essex County Councillors decided to fence off and claim ownership of part of a playing field which had previously served Hadleigh Junior School. That the aforementioned Councillors did this as part of a political response to the democratic decision of parents to secure for the school Grant Maintained status. That we are deeply concerned that the whole playing field is needed by the children and should be retained for educational and community use. That we are deeply concerned about the County Councillors' intention to build homes on the land or to sell off the land for housebuilding at some time in the future. That we deplore the decision of Labour Borough Councillors to change the Local Plan Draft in order to remove the designation of the field for educational use. That we support Councillor Doug Robert's objection to the Borough Draft Local Plan to reinstate the land usage as exclusively educational and community use which would prevent further housebuilding and all the consequential adverse environmental and traffic implications. We are disappointed that the Educational Assets Board have rejected Hadleigh Junior School's claim against the County Councillors and we seek to have this decision reversed.

Wherefore your petitioners pray, that your Honourable House do urge the right hon. John Major MP, Prime Minister, to use his powers to reverse the decision of the Education Assets Board and save Hadleigh School playing field for the children.

And your petitioners in duty bound will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Campbell's Soups

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Since last October, I have been running a determined campaign seeking the reversal of the decision by Campbell's Soups of the United States of America to close the Homepride plant in my constituency. In an Adjournment debate in November, I set out the background to that decision, while expressing the anger of the people of Maryport over the loss of one of the town's foremost employers. Campbell's Soups, having paid £58.6 million for the plant at the beginning of August last year, promptly announced its closure 11 weeks later.

The decision was an outrage. It has never been justified commercially, and has been repeatedly questioned during a number of television programmes and articles in the national press—notably the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, the *Financial Times*, the *Daily Mirror*, the regional media, and "Newsnight".

Since the announcement, I have lobbied the Prime Minister, raised innumerable questions on the Floor of the House, used every available parliamentary procedural peg to put the case for my constituents, attended Campbell's annual general meeting in Camden, New Jersey, to lobby shareholders, and visited the King's Lynn Campbell's Soups plant to which production is being transferred, with a personal appeal to the work force for their support.

During the campaign, I have written to 2,300 newspaper editors in every part of the kingdom seeking publication of a letter appealing for a national boycott of Campbell's Soups products; written to more than 300 major supermarket groups and chains promoting the boycott; approached thousands of organisations throughout the country, either directly or by way of correspondence, drawing attention to the plight of my constituents; and secured the support of 340 Members of Parliament on a motion asking for the company to reverse its decision.

On the international stage, I have, in conjunction with British trade unions, sought the support of trade unions throughout the western world and liaised with Tony Cunningham, Member of the European Parliament for Cumbria, in promoting the boycott throughout the Community.

However, all that effort has been to no avail. The company, which is 58 per cent. owned by a single family and its successors in the United States, prefers to thwart the views of the majority in the House of Commons—as expressed in the early-day motion—by insisting upon pursuing its original decision. The motion received the 13th largest number of signatures of the 30,000 similar motions tabled in the past 56 years in the House of Commons.

The facts are that Campbell's Soups, through its wholly owned, unaccountable British operations, has proved completely insensitive to the very reasonable and commercially sound pleas that it has received from various parts of the world. To cap it all, the Homepride work force have been driven into a financial settlement with the company under the pressure of changes in entitlement to unemployment benefit, while the redundancy package has been tailored in such a way as to ensure loyalty until the final day of operations. The work force have been effectively silenced. In my view, it is the worst closure decision in the constituency in the past 16 years—it is an outrage from start to finish.

My response, with the boycott campaign of Campbell's Soups and Fray Bentos products, has clearly been successful, considering the thousands of letters and approaches that I have had from all over the country. Recent attempts to provoke discussion among Campbell's Soups King's Lynn work force—the beneficiaries of the Maryport closure—have failed. It knows that King's Lynn does not need the Homepride lines. It knows also that offers of employment to Maryport workers ring hollow when the same jobs are being offered to King's Lynn workers.

The reality is that only half a dozen people are transferring from Maryport—mostly from management—and statistics produced by Coutts to identify employment opportunities in the Maryport area are nonsense. Coutts' statistics are the laughing stock of west Cumbria. Its well-meaning operation has simply succeeded in reducing the availability of job opportunities for the existing unemployed. Campbell's has not created a single job.

The King's Lynn work force, without union recognition, has been particularly unresponsive, and is kept on a tight rein by Campbell's management. Perhaps that accounts for the lack of national publicity surrounding the five scalding incidents and one fatal accident at the King's Lynn site, which were revealed in a parliamentary answer to me last week. The King's Lynn work force should be asking why Campbell's Soups promotes union recognition in America and not in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No, I am sorry, but I wish to complete my remarks. I shall certainly give way if I have time, or the hon. Gentleman can intervene on the Minister.

To answer the boycott, Campbell's has employed the services of Barclay Stratten for advice. I believe that it has been poorly advised—indeed, journalists have described it as incompetent. It would have been better if the company had used its own Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk. He would certainly have corrected its wildly inaccurate interpretation of events, and particularly its suggestion that I was annoyed by his intervention. I can only advise Campbell's to review the Barclay Stratten account.

What of the future? I have argued repeatedly that Campbell's Soups purchased Homepride only for its brand name. The reality is that the Homepride brand name and the "Fred" advertising logo have opened the door to immense further potential in national distribution. Dalgety recognised that potential, which is why it decided to invest more than £9 million in Maryport in 1994.

Dalgety's former finance director, Mr. Peter Byers, who was responsible for Homepride operations and who now works for Campbell's Soups, recognised the potential for cook-in sauces. I suspect that he was the key to the Campbell's Soups decision. His role in the whole affair raises a number of questions. He, drawing on his time at Homepride, must have known that the Homepride label would open the door to increased market share.

The die is cast, and we must now look to the future. I now understand, and the House should know, that there have been early discussions in west Cumbria about a proposal to establish a new company, to be called Marypride. That company could manufacture processed food products. The idea is in its infancy. The Marypride brand name knocks on an open door. From the point of view of the local community in Maryport, it would capitalise on pride that the townspeople have in their community. What they have built in the past could be re-created in the future. I wish to say no more on that matter at this stage.

The House should also consider the lessons that can be learnt from the takeover of Homepride, and there are many. Campbell's Soups' acquisition arose only in conditions of binding confidentiality on bidders at the time of the Dalgety sale.

The question we need to ask is whether it is in the public interest for a predator in the market, hiding behind a wall of such confidentiality, to be able to acquire a target company without any element of accountability. Under current arrangements, the whole area is unregulated, and it is not my purpose to advocate onerous regulatory requirements that undermine enterprise and impede the operations of the market. Nevertheless, takeover arrangements in those limited conditions require some greater transparency to balance the interests of employees with those of shareholders and corporate decision takers.

In the Homepride case, at least six organisations submitted bids during the Dalgety auction. Most of the bids came from companies or consortia that intended to keep the Homepride plant open. In the case of at least one bid, I am confident that—if that company had won—not only would Homepride have been secure, but it would have grown into a substantial food manufacturing company over the years, and would have employed many hundreds of people. The problem was that the accepted bid came from a company whose intentions were closure. It all happened behind closed doors. The Mustoe agenda was realised in conditions of total confidentiality. No one knew of the impending holocaust.

I ask a simple question: is it in the public interest for bids to be transacted in such secrecy? Could corporate takeovers survive greater transparency? What would have happened if, at the time of bidding for Homepride, each bidder—having cleared the preliminary hurdles—had been required immediately prior to bids closing to indicate publicly their interest in Homepride?

The interested parties—the local authorities, the regional Department of Trade and Industry, the training and enterprise council, the local development agencies, the Member of Parliament and, most of all, the work force—would have known which companies were bidding, and, after the close of bids, whom to approach about the prospects for the company. Every bidder would have received an approach as to their intentions. They might have remained silent, but we can be sure that a number of bidders would have been prepared to give assurances as to the future. Dalgety, subject to public pressure, would at least have taken those assurances into account.

One could easily devise a regulatory framework for such a proposal. All that it would require is a bid notification procedure. That single regulatory change would allow decisions on the acceptability of bids to be influenced by issues other than price, as is the case today on environmental matters. Transparency would open the door to an element of accountability.

In the Homepride case, if such a procedure had been in operation, Campbell's Soups would probably never have succeeded and, even if it had survived the bidding stage, public pressure would have forced a withdrawal prior to or even during exchange of contracts. Its motives would have been flushed out far earlier, and Dalgety would have been obliged to sell to a more sensitive predator. Alternatively, Dalgety itself, conscious of its public image, might have sought some form of undertaking about Maryport's future, if only to avoid a public row.

It is arguable that these transparency arrangements could be taken a stage further. Some might argue that bidders should be identified, and that there should be a regulatory requirement on them to define their intentions for a given period—for example, nine or 12 months. That might take the form of a time-limited statement of intent—I call it an SOI—at the time of public notification of the bid. I recognise the complications that could arise under an SOI procedure, certainly in terms of disclosure of commercially confidential information to bidders by vendors. Nevertheless, having given the matter much thought over recent weeks, I do not regard the difficulties as insurmountable.

The professionals would have to adjust. We could set a threshold below which notification would not be required, so as to avoid unnecessary burdens being placed on smaller acquisitions. I suggest a threshold of £20 million in cash or equivalents.

Some argue that such proposals might damage the bidder's commercial credibility if he were to fail—markets do not like losers. Equally, an element of market and employee instability might be induced in the target's work force. We must weigh these considerations against the rights of employees to influence where they are going. I believe that the exercise is damage-limitation manageable if the time between bid notification and ink on contract is limited. I accept that problems could arise where a bid is issued for loss-making assets.

Corporate decisions are often difficult and unpopular. Very often, the inevitable consequence of rationalisation in a sector where losses are being incurred is job losses. Bid notification could prove difficult in these conditions, especially if we regulated for an additional SOI requirement. The answer to the difficulty may well lie in the way in which the vendor presents his own options to his work force. That would certainly sharpen the debate over rescue packages, but these are not uncharted waters for talented management.

[Mr. Campbell-Savours]

My proposal needs much refining if it is to be included in legislation. It is little more than the embryo of an idea for further consideration at this stage, but I believe that it should be taken seriously.

I have tried to identify legal frameworks for notification proposals. My preliminary view is that disclosure provisions in the case of bankruptcy under rule 4.11 of the insolvency rules 1986, disclosure provisions for winding-up orders under section 130(1) of the Insolvency Act 1986, and disclosure provisions in the use of administration orders under rule 2.10 of the insolvency rules 1986 all point the way forward. In each instance, disclosure is required in the *London Gazette*, which is published in London, Edinburgh and Belfast.

I ask the Minister seriously to consider my proposal for what I intend to promote as the Campbell's Soups amendment. Let some good come out of this whole squalid affair.

10.32 pm

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): I acknowledge straight away the concern of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) about the closure of the Maryport plant. I realise that it is a blow for his constituency. But the matter is for the commercial judgment of Campbell's. It would be wrong for the Government to intervene in such decisions. I say also in the margins of the debate that there is a fair amount of understanding between the hon. Gentleman and myself over this matter. If I do not in the time available cover all the points he raised, I shall certainly refer to the matter in a letter to him.

I fully understand the depth of the hon. Gentleman's concern for his constituents, but he must bear in mind the fact that Campbell's has been present in the United Kingdom since 1959. The company employs about 1,200 people here, and has shown its commitment to the UK by recently investing over £100 million. The Government would not want to threaten these jobs and investment.

I realise that closure must be very disappointing for Maryport, and in particular the 120 employees involved, but I understand that Campbell's has offered all employees jobs at one of its five other plants.

I know that the hon. Gentleman is aware that Maryport is within an assisted area and, as such, qualifies for regional selective assistance for investments that create or safeguard jobs. That means that the site of the Campbell's Soup plant qualifies for RSA. Proposals by companies wishing to invest in the facility would be considered for support against the criteria for RSA awards. Of course, it is not for Government to say what type of business might make use of the site.

A range of other services is also available through the local Cumbria training and enterprise council, through business links, and through Inward, the north-west development agency, which could assist in attracting new businesses to invest in the area of the Campbell's site. Those services include business advice counselling, diagnostic and consultancy services, exports advice, business enterprise services, and technical expertise as well as access to the personal business advisor network. I know, for example, that Cumbria TEC already offers practical help to individual employees of Homepride and will continue to do so beyond closure.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that west Cumbria has European objective 2 status, which gives the area access to funding for business support measures, and also for the cost of training and re-skilling activities.

Let me remind the House that the food industry is a very successful UK industry. The success of the industry in recent years can be demonstrated by the figures on exports: in 1988, UK exports of food and drink were worth some £5 billion. By 1994—six years later—they were worth some £9 billion.

The rest of Europe, and, indeed, the world, is finding out how good British food and drink really are. British bread is chic in Paris, and British lamb and Scottish salmon are particularly well regarded there. We are selling pizzas to Italy and ice cream to Spain. Such successes are a tribute to the industry, and also to the Government's determination to create and maintain an economic framework within which such enterprise can be rewarded.

Sales by the UK food and drink manufacturing industries in 1994 were worth more than £56 billion. With a work force of about 450,000, the sector accounted for one in nine jobs in manufacturing. The industry has continued to compete effectively in world markets, with 1994 exports of food, feed and drink valued at £9 billion.

The soups and sauces industry is no exception to this success story. In 1992, UK exports were worth some £13 million, with major markets established in Ireland, Germany and France. Not only that, but the UK consumer can choose from a vast array of delicious and imaginative soups and sauces on sale at the supermarket, grocer or corner shop. The competitive nature of the market means that companies are constantly looking for new product types and ideas to provide what the consumer wants.

The UK soup market has recently been characterised by rapid innovation and increased choice, not only in the variety of flavours on the market but by different product types, such as low-calorie, premium, chilled and fresh. Sales of soup are expected to continue to grow steadily in the near future. I have no doubt that Campbell's Soups will continue to play a significant role in this expanding and innovative market.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the role of merger control. As he knows, the Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on qualifying mergers. The director general looked at this transaction, and concluded that it did not give rise to a qualifying merger.

The transaction met neither of the tests in the Fair Trading Act 1973. The assets being acquired were only £9 million, as I understand it, which is some way short of the £70 million test in the Act. Indeed, it is short of the hon. Gentleman's suggested £20 million. The market share test—that a 25 per cent. share should be created or increased—was not met, either. There was therefore no role for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in the matter. He had no decision to make on the acquisition.

Let me remind the House that a merger can be blocked only if the Monopolies and Mergers Commission finds it to be against the public interest. Furthermore, since 1984, the policy of the Government has been to make decisions about whether mergers are referred to the MMC primarily on competition grounds. That policy will continue.

The hon. Gentleman called for greater transparency in such bidding procedures. I emphasise that the conduct of the sale of Homepride Sauces was a commercial matter for Dalgety; it would be wrong for Government to intervene in such matters. There are no plans to change existing legislation or policy governing mergers.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Under this Government.

Mr. Taylor: I am speaking for this Government, as I think the hon. Gentleman knows.

There have been calls for the Fair Trading Act to be amended, so that smaller mergers can be considered by the competition authorities. As the House will know, in February 1994, the assets threshold for mergers was increased from £30 million to £70 million: that was agreed by Parliament as part of the Government's deregulation initiative. The change does not signal a weakening of competition policy; all larger mergers, and any small mergers that create or increase a 25 per cent. market share, will still be considered under the Fair Trading Act. The measure is clearly deregulatory, and has been welcomed by business generally.

Let me also make it clear that United Kingdom and foreign companies are treated alike under UK merger procedures. The Government feel that commercial considerations should generally determine ownership of businesses. UK companies themselves do very well overseas, and long may that continue.

There have been calls for predatory takeovers to be blocked. I understand that Dalgety put the Homepride business up for sale and decided to sell to Campbell's. That was a normal commercial transaction. As I said earlier, it would be wrong for the Government to intervene in commercial decisions: companies must be free to adjust to the competitive demands of the market.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the role of foreign companies in the UK economy. I remind him that the Government welcome foreign investors, and will continue to do so. Nowhere is the competitiveness of our economy better demonstrated than in our ability to attract inward investment.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the Minister think that it would be much fairer if a work force knew when the enterprise for which they worked was being put on the market and bid for?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn that my knowledge of the company and the transaction is not as detailed as his. In fact, it would be rather surprising if, as Member of Parliament for Solihull, I knew as much about Maryport as he does. I shall reflect on what he has said, because good practice should always involve consultation; but I do not wish to stray into matters involving his constituency or a particular transaction.

I was talking about inward investment. More than 40 per cent. of all United States, Canadian and Japanese investment in the European Union, together with over 50 per cent. of Korean and over 57 per cent. of Taiwanese investment, has come to the United Kingdom. Our stock of inward investment is now £147 billion—up from £44.3 billion in 1985—and 99 of the "Fortune" top 100 companies have chosen to locate in the UK. Our record in attracting inward investment within the European Union is second to none.

The UK has a long history of welcoming overseas inward investment—over 100 years. We have made Britain the most attractive place in which to invest. The facts speak for themselves. Since 1979, my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau has registered more than 4,200 inward investment projects, with more than 700,000 associated jobs. In recent months, we have secured investments from Ford, Siemens, Nissan, Fujitsu and Chunghwa. That equals more than 11,200 jobs.

In the last financial year alone, we won some 454 inward investment projects, supporting some 91,000 jobs. Those jobs are in tomorrow's industries—highly skilled, bringing the best management standards, with exciting potential, down the supply chain of industry.

Mr. Bellingham: My hon. Friend will remember that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said that there were recognised trade unions at all Campbell's plants throughout the country. Is he aware that the staff at the factory at King's Lynn have been given the opportunity on a number of occasions to have trade union representation, but have opted for an advisory committee? Indeed, they have had many recent opportunities to reverse that decision, but have decided not to.

Mr. Taylor: I am very interested to learn that. I was not, candidly speaking, aware of what my hon. Friend says. I am very glad that he has put it on the record, however.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Perhaps I may tell the Minister that the King's Lynn work force is one of the lowest paid in the processed food industry in the whole of the UK.

Mr. Taylor: This evening might have been more interesting if we had had a debate between the hon. Member for Workington and my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham). I have a role to discharge, however, and limited time in which to do so.

Inward investors add significant strength to our industrial economy. Overseas-owned manufacturers provide a third of all manufacturing investment, nearly a fifth of manufacturing employment, over one fifth of manufacturing output, and about two fifths of UK-manufactured exports. The Government are determined to maintain this enviable record. We must be competitive to attract inward investment.

Britain has many attractions for the inward investor: a strong economy, a pro-business environment and the world language. We also have no foreign exchange controls or restrictions on sending profits abroad. Britain

[Mr. Taylor]

offers the best available combination of a skilled and flexible work force, low taxes, lower production costs and a mature system of law. These are all good reasons for the United Kingdom's success.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my hon. Friend understand that this whole matter has caused a great deal of unhappiness in Cumbria? I have asked Campbell's to look at the matter again, but have not heard from the company. Will the Minister do the same?

Mr. Taylor: With only seconds to go, all that I can tell my right hon. Friend is that I shall certainly reflect on what he says—the more so since the question comes from him. I shall take his request very seriously indeed.

The closure of the site in the hon. Gentleman's constituency is, I recognise, an unwelcome event. With the assistance of Government support, through regional selective assistance and other services on offer, I hope that another employer may be able to move into the plant, but let me emphasise again that the closure of the plant reflects Campbell's commercial decision, and it would be wrong for the Government to intervene.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 March 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Bosnia

1. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by the implementation force; and if he will make a statement. [16837]

2. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the work of IFOR to date; and if he will make a statement. [16838]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): The implementation force has made considerable progress in helping to implement the Dayton peace agreement. Although there is still a long way to go, it is certainly to be congratulated on its achievements so far.

Mr. Couchman: My right hon. Friend will know that the corps headquarters of the Royal Engineers is at the Royal School of Military Engineering in my constituency. Will he join me in paying tribute to the Royal Engineers' enormous work in Bosnia as part of the United Nations peacekeeping force and IFOR? He will also know that the Royal Engineers have served for a very long time in Northern Ireland and that since he last answered Defence questions the IRA ceasefire has broken down. Will he assure the House that if the situation in Northern Ireland deteriorates he will, if necessary, be able to increased forces there and meet the commitment to IFOR?

Mr. Portillo: The Royal Engineers have done an outstanding job under the UN and NATO and, as my hon. Friend says, in Northern Ireland. They have been building roads, clearing mines and restoring essential services for the forces and the civilian population. When the IRA ceasefire was announced, we were able to reposition three battalions outside Northern Ireland. Although they were relocated, they were not reallocated and were therefore available to be returned to Northern Ireland. Two of them have returned to Northern Ireland and I can assure my hon. Friend that there is no question but that the British Army is able to undertake its commitment in Bosnia and Northern Ireland simultaneously.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Jerry Hayes.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: He is not here.

Madam Speaker: I am aware of that. I called his name because he has not sent an apology. I therefore call Mrs. Alice Mahon.

Mrs. Mahon: Does the Minister agree that the considerable number of anti-personnel land mines in Bosnia are causing a great deal of trouble for our troops? Is it not time that the Government opposed the making and exporting of all such mines?

Mr. Portillo: It is certainly evident that the mines have caused a great deal of problems, injuries and death among civilians and service personnel. The main responsibility for clearing those mines lies with the former warring factions and they are being overseen in that work by the implementation force. I certainly think that we should work with civilised nations around the world to introduce suitable restrictions on the exports of lethal weapons, but I do not believe that it is possible to ban the use of land mines, or indeed to ban their export. None the less, progress can be made and Britain has been working to make progress knowing that it is better to get an agreement that will stick than to take positions that will not.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that IFOR is receiving full co-operation from the Bosnian Government? What success is it having in persuading the Serbs in certain areas of Sarajevo that they have no need to leave in fear?

Mr. Portillo: On the whole, implementation of the peace agreement has proceeded quite well, but my hon. Friend will know that there have been instances where each of the former warring factions has been behind in complying with its terms. A summit in Rome in mid-February helped to make some progress in sorting that out. The Bosnian Government have been at pains to make it clear that the Serbs in the suburbs of Sarajevo have no need to fear for their safety. We are certainly urging the Bosnian Government to take every opportunity to repeat those assurances and ensure that the security arrangements in the suburbs are such as to leave no reason for any Serb to leave.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The Secretary of State will be well aware that, largely because of internal pressures in the United States, the United States component and IFOR has a strict 12-month timetable. Is he concerned, therefore, that there is a danger of a hiatus emerging at the end of that period? If so, what contingency plans have been made to ensure that the withdrawal gives way peacefully and properly to a civilian component?

Mr. Portillo: This is not a concern exclusively of the United States—all participating nations in NATO are concerned that the deployment is limited in its scope and duration. The tasks that we in NATO have set ourselves—the separation of the warring factions, the exchange of prisoners, the exchange of territory and the holding of free and fair elections—are all achievable within 12 months. It is important that the former warring factions realise that the deployment will be for 12 months and that they must establish within that period conditions in which there can be an enduring peace. So much can change in Bosnia in a short period, and things are different now from the position nine months ago. I see no profit in speculating

on what might happen at the end of the period. NATO will be there for 12 months, and I hope that that will focus the minds of everyone involved.

RAF Personnel (Secondment)

3. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force personnel have been seconded to overseas posts on more than one occasion in the last five years. [16839]

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): Statistics relating to the secondment of Royal Air Force personnel to overseas posts are not held centrally. In general, the initial period is sometimes extended and some personnel occasionally undertake a second or subsequent period of secondment.

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend will be aware that individuals in some sections of the service are required to do more than others because of the scarcity of personnel with particular skills and experience. Will he confirm that the Government are well aware of the difficulties that have arisen in that area? Will he assure me and the House that something will be done to address what is a relic of "Options for Change"—something for which my hon. Friend bears no responsibility?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me a chance to flag up the extraordinary achievements of the RAF in the past few years. The RAF undoubtedly has been through a period of profound change and uncertainty in many different areas, but the Royal Air Force board and all the young men and women in the service have handled those changes with great aplomb, skill and determination. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to his former service and the way in which it has coped. There have been difficulties, but the RAF has handled them well. I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurances that he wants.

Dr. David Clark: Does not the Minister's answer confirm that the pressure on men and machines in the RAF caused by overstretch is becoming unacceptable? Have not the additional demands on the RAF—the air exclusion zones in Bosnia and in north and south Iraq and the flying in of relief to Sarajevo—put intense pressure on it? Does he intend to announce thousands of further redundancies in the RAF later this month?

Mr. Soames: By his remarks, the hon. Gentleman shows a profound and true misunderstanding of the RAF and of all those who work in it. Clearly the RAF wants to be involved in these operations, and although it has been busy and the demands on it have been heavy, that is what the RAF exists for. Reductions in the numbers of aircraft and RAF personnel have been carefully planned, and have been approved by the Royal Air Force board. The reductions are entirely consistent with the RAF's commitments and do not compromise either its requirements for training or flight safety. The hon. Gentleman is right that the RAF is busy and stretched, but that is what it needs and wants. We have sympathy and understanding for the RAF as it works its way through a difficult period. It deserves great credit for handling the problems so well.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the RAF on the way in which it has conducted its peacekeeping role in northern and southern Iraq and Bosnia? Does he think that it could continue to perform such peacekeeping roles around the world if he were to follow the policies suggested to Opposition Members by, for example, the Transport and General Workers Union, which, in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, advocated an £18 billion cut in defence spending each year?

Mr. Soames: It would clearly be unable to do so. The defence review cherished by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark)—which he calls on the services to accept and would ram down their throat—would deny them the chance to undertake the operations at which they excel so brilliantly. It just goes to show that, as we all know, we could not possibly—and never have been able to—trust Labour with defence.

RAF (Engineering Services)

4. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future provision of engineering services to the RAF from RAF St. Athan. [16840]

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): RAF St. Athan provides a high quality and responsive service to the Royal Air Force. The current "Competing for Quality" programme is designed to ensure that that will continue.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank the Minister for that reply and I am well aware of the excellent service provided by RAF St. Athan on the borders of my constituency. There are concerns about the way in which the service is being stretched. Will the Minister assure me that the service at RAF St. Athan will be maintained at least at its current level—and possibly increased given the need to carry out even more regular checks on our Tornado and other aircraft in the light of the spate of serious crashes earlier this year?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking that question and for the way in which he put it. I had the great good fortune to visit RAF St. Athan on 22 February and I found there an extremely loyal, hard-working and highly trained work force who give the Royal Air Force everything that it needs in terms of quality and commitment. I was extremely impressed by what they do. We very much regret the recent spate of accidents, particularly those involving loss of life, and we extend our sympathy to the families involved. We have started investigations into all the accidents and it is becoming plain that there is no common thread to them. They involve different types of errors, different types of aircraft and different services—some involve the Royal Air Force and some the Royal Navy. However, we are not complacent and are examining all the accidents with great care.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital to maintain within the Royal Air Force maintenance units such as St. Athan for third-line servicing because "Competing for Quality" necessitates a benchmark to

compete against for the quality of service and standards of servicing required? There will be occasions when industry will not necessarily have the appropriate expertise.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right: the "Competing for Quality" programme involves improvements in quality and a great increase in value for money. We have saved much money for the front line. The Royal Air Force will continue to manage RAF St. Athan. We know that the in-house bid team at RAF St. Athan is highly dedicated and, because of its skills, it is confident that it will be able to win the tender.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister agree that it is vital that the maintenance at RAF St. Athan is top class, particularly for the aircraft that carry out low flying over my constituency and other parts of the south of Scotland? When will those Members, including the right hon. Members for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) and for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who went to see the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, receive a report on the reduction in low flying in the borders tactical training area?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I cannot answer that question, but I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his ingenuity in bringing the subject of low flying into a question about St. Athan. I shall pass on what he says to my noble Friend the Under-Secretary.

Defence Industry Jobs

5. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received as to the effect on defence industry jobs of reducing United Kingdom defence expenditure to the European average. [16841]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A reduction in UK defence expenditure to the current NATO European average would result in cuts of more than £4.5 billion per year. This would have a drastic effect on the capability of our armed forces and the future equipment programme. The implications for jobs in the defence industry would be severe.

Mr. Coombs: What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the impact of the policy decided at the 1995 conference of the Transport and General Workers Union that our defence expenditure should be reduced to the average of all countries across the European Union? Bearing in mind the fact that the TGWU sponsors both the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask questions for which the Government have a responsibility. Will he remember that?

Mr. Coombs: Bearing in mind the fact that the Transport and General Workers Union sponsors both the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor, what advice would my hon. Friend the Minister give companies in my constituency such as Raychem, which employ thousands of people making defence equipment, about how they should vote?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right. I have to tell the House with some astonishment that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has received a letter from the Transport and General Workers Union, which states:

> "Conference notes that a reduction in military spending to that of other western European countries in percentage GDP terms could mean a peace dividend of over £18 billion a year."

It is worse than we thought. The Labour party does not want to reduce defence spending by £4.5 billion a year but by £18 billion a year. We know that the TGWU speaks for the Labour party because it sponsors the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). We know that he speaks for the Labour party because in the late 1980s he signed an advertisement calling for the removal of nuclear weapons from British territory. We know that that is what the Labour party wants and the TGWU calls for precisely the same thing in its letter.

Mr. Hardy: Is the Minister aware that many people believe that the Government are blithely continuing to accept a much higher share of the burdens of European security than most other western European states? While we retain the presidency of the Western European Union, will he and his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office seek to persuade our European allies that they should bear a much larger share of responsibility for security, especially since some of those who pay less than average are most vociferous in pursuing the policy of Europe establishing its own security pillar?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman confirms exactly what I said. He confirms that he would like to reduce our defence spending to the European average. I am astonished that that should come from him of all people. I thought that with his experience, he would have wanted this country to take its proper role and responsibilities in the world. That is what we want and that is why we intend to stay in power to achieve it.

Mr. Mans: In relation to defence expenditure generally, and defence jobs in particular, will my hon. Friend say what stage has been reached in the studies on the updating of the Tornado F3 or leasing of the alternative American F16 aircraft?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that because I am delighted to be able to tell the House that, subject to contract, and while we wait for the Eurofighter to form the cornerstone of our defence capability in the next decade, we have decided to place with British Aerospace an order so that advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles and advanced short-range air-to-air missiles can be carried on the Tornado F3. That will greatly enhance the Tornado's capability and will cost about £125 million. It will mean that we have a beyond-visual-range missile available for our fighter. That is good news for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Spellar: The earlier exchanges have shown why the Minister does not want to answer for the Government's record. If he did, he would have to explain why the Government had to be dragged kicking and screaming to award the field ambulance contract to Land Rover; why they have awarded another shells contract to an Italian company involved in fraud and a grenade contract to Israel; why they issued tenders for the helicopter flying school without offset provision; and why they ordered billions of dollars of US equipment without matching orders for British industry. When are they going to stop making party-political broadcasts and start backing British industry?

Mr. Arbuthnot: That was a good try. The problem is that, if the Labour party were in power, none of those contracts would be awarded because it would not have the money. We would not have the Apache helicopter or the land-attack missile. We would not have been able to order three more frigates last week and we would not have been able to sort out the Eurofighter. If the Labour party were in power, defence spending would be reduced to £4 billion—the level of traffic wardens.

Mr. Atkins: What does my hon. Friend believe is the likely effect on defence industry jobs in Preston and in Lancashire generally of early-day motions, such as those signed by the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), which suggest that we should not sell the excellent products made by my constituents on behalf of British Aerospace to countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend is right. I was very surprised to see that the hon. Lady had signed the early-day motion calling for literally hundreds of her constituents to be put out of work. However, she must answer for her views to her constituents.

Armed Forces (Women)

6. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many women are currently serving in the armed forces. [16842]

7. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the number of women serving in the armed forces. [16844]

Mr. Soames: As at 1 January this year, there were 16,078 women serving in the armed forces. That represents approximately 7 per cent. of the total strength.

Mrs. Prentice: Is the Minister aware that it is International Women's Week? Will he join me and my right hon. and hon. Friends in celebrating the work of women in the armed services, particularly their front line peacekeeping work in Bosnia? On behalf of the House, will he send a message of support to those women this week?

Mr. Soames: I was not aware that it is International Women's Week. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I feel a tremendous surge of pleasure when we hear that happy news: we salute all women everywhere.

The hon. Lady makes a very good point and I have great pleasure in endorsing all that she has said. It is clear that women make an enormous contribution to the armed forces. I know that most Labour Members believe that it is a miracle if a woman is capable of licking an envelope, yet women fill some of the most important and responsible jobs in the armed forces. That is a matter of course to those who serve alongside them and we value their contribution enormously. We want to see more women, not fewer, in the armed forces.

Ms Coffey: Will the Minister confirm whether his Department is a member of Opportunity 2000? If it is, what progress has he made towards achieving the objectives of Opportunity 2000, which aims to promote more women to leadership positions?

Mr. Soames: It is my experience that the Ministry of Defence is a member of practically everything, so I am sure that we are a member of Opportunity 2000. The fact is that we do not need to be a member of that scheme to promote women into positions of responsibility: they get there under their own steam because they are very good at what they do. There are women at every rank of the armed forces and in every service. They undertake the most responsible, difficult and often dangerous work. I recently met a company commander in the sappers who is leading the company that is undertaking most of the mine clearance operations in Bosnia. We do not need that kind of politically correct nonsense in the armed forces: women succeed on their own account.

Mr. Marlow: Does my hon. Friend agree that the standards, the qualities and the ability of Her Majesty's forces are unequalled and envied throughout the world? Will he give the House an undertaking to provide whatever legislation is necessary to prevent our standing from being undermined or tampered with by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality or any stupid, anti-democratic and unaccountable European court?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend, as a former sapper, speaks with genuine passion on that subject, and he is correct. The armed forces have a distinction and a quality that are unmatched in any institution in British life. They are a golden asset to the country and we shall never do anything that will undermine their fighting effectiveness or fighting power.

It is a great compliment to the British armed forces that President Chirac should make it plain to a wider public in France that he intends the French forces to be restructured along the lines of our existing British forces. No greater compliment could be paid to the British armed forces.

Lady Olga Maitland: As a new recruit to the parliamentary armed services scheme, may I say how much I appreciate the opportunity that the armed forces give women? Will my hon. Friend confirm that the opportunities that have been given to women are shown by the fact that we now have two fully qualified fast-jet pilots and 17 fully qualified pilots in the other services, and that women are doing immensely important work in

the field? Will he confirm that he will continue his endeavours to recruit more women, from whom we get value for money?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend certainly gives value for money and I am grateful for her extremely generous tribute. She has done sterling work on behalf of all three services, and they and I are grateful to her.

Obviously, women have made giant strides in employment in the armed forces. They are now in significant new areas of opportunity. I agree with my hon. Friend that we should do whatever we can to recruit more women, and she has my assurance that we shall do so.

Mr. Murphy: It is good to hear that the Minister has heard about the Government's policies from the Opposition today.

The Minister spoke of women in the armed forces being in important jobs. Will he therefore tell the House why, of 509 one-star and above posts in all three armed services, only two are held by women?

Mr. Soames: I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making. The two most senior women now serving in the armed forces hold the rank of air commodore—the equivalent of brigadier. As he says, there are two of them. No rank is not open to women. The great surge of women through the armed forces and through the rank structure is starting to be felt. Unlike the Labour party, we do not have to have all-women lists to ensure that women get to where they should be—the top.

Mr. Jenkin: On what basis does my hon. Friend suppose that the provisions of the EC equal treatment directive do not apply to the armed forces?

Mr. Soames: I am sorry, but this EC nonsense is way beyond me. I do not understand. *[Laughter]*

Madam Speaker: Order. That remark closes that question.

Abbey Wood

8. **Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to investigate the overrun on the construction of the new MOD building at Abbey Wood, Bristol; and if he will make a statement. [16845]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Requirements for the buildings at Abbey Wood are being met; costs and risks are being controlled; collocation of procurement executive HQ staff has started and is expected to be complete by this autumn; overruns are not on our agenda. We are committed to achieving the running cost savings that will result.

Mr. Berry: Will the Minister confirm that the construction contractors have lodged a claim with the MOD for an additional £60 million, which corresponds to a staggering 30 per cent. of construction costs? Is the Minister aware that many subcontractors are suffering from late payment from the contractor because of the contractor's cash-flow problems?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman has got the wrong end of the stick. There is a perfectly constructive and amicable dialogue between the core and shell contractor and the Ministry of Defence, as would occur on any project of this size. This is the largest office building project in Europe, and it is a dramatic success. The question of the health of the relationship between the contractor and the sub-contractors is interesting, and we believe that it is very good. In every contract that we sign, a requirement is placed on our contractors to ensure that they pay their sub-contractors within 30 days of a valid invoice being submitted. We have no reason to believe that there is anything other than a healthy relationship between the contractors and the sub-contractors.

Mr. Brazier: Does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a remarkable transformation in procurement practices under the Government? I am referring to the new headquarters for the Procurement Executive. Does he also agree that we are able to afford more equipment and more bangs per buck because the procurement executive has been reorganised and redeployed on much more efficient lines?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. Once the building of the Procurement Executive is completed, it will save approximately £105 million a year. It is an astonishing success story, and I am sorry that Labour Members do not recognise that. For example, approximately 1,000 local jobs will be created in the Kingswood area; approximately 200 local firms will be involved in contracting; approximately £200 million will be spent on construction; and approximately £90 million of extra spending power will be realised. The Abbey Wood procurement is a dramatic success story, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to discuss it.

Dr. David Clark: Will the Minister confirm that this was a fixed-price contract? Will he give the House an assurance that, in the event of a cost overrun, not a penny will be spent out of the public purse?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I regret to put it like this: that is a fatuous comment. The contract will be finished on time and within budget—that is what we intend to achieve, that is what we are negotiating to achieve and, so far, it has been a major success story.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that the carping from a Labour Member in relation to these additional jobs is reprehensible? Does he agree that, if there is any problem with the people of Bristol wanting to have the jobs, we would be only too pleased to keep the Southwell site open a bit longer on Portland? We are very proud of working for the Royal Navy. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for announcing that one of the new frigates will be called HMS Portland, in honour of the excellent work that has been done by my constituents over the decades.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I can confirm that. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his suggestion, which we have taken up, that we call the new frigate HMS Portland. It is a pity that the good news that is coming to Bristol as a result of the Abbey Wood procurement has not been brought out

at all. It must be noted that Abbey Wood is a success story. We have had to provide, and we have been willing to provide, significant funds towards the building of a new railway station near Abbey Wood because so many workers are flooding into the area. It is a victim of its own success—and the Labour party simply cannot see that.

Scott Inquiry

9. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the findings of the Scott report relating to his Department. [16846]

Mr. Portillo: My Department will be working closely with the Department of Trade and Industry in its review of export control powers and procedures, and will lead the review of the parliamentary convention on the release of information about defence exports.

Mr. Hain: Does the Secretary of State accept that the Scott report found that key documents that would have led to the Matrix Churchill trial being stopped were in the Ministry of Defence, but were not disclosed to either the prosecution or the defence? For example, section G9.2 of the report referred to a letter from a civil servant, Mr. Barrett, to Defence Ministers, which showed that Matrix Churchill lathes were supplying shells to the Iraqis. That being the case—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must come to his question to the Minister and not give us a long recitation. He must now ask a question directly of the Minister.

Mr. Hain: That being the case, there were surely massive failures in the Ministry of Defence. What is the Secretary of State doing to make sure that the failures that Scott revealed are not repeated?

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has made it perfectly clear that all the Scott recommendations either have been implemented or will be considered carefully. The Scott report points out that we have already taken steps to change and improve our procedures before the report was even brought to fruition. Individual cases will be investigated thoroughly and the House will know the results of those investigations. However, the hon. Gentleman is now dredging pretty deep in a matter that has been discussed exhaustively in the House already.

Mr. Garnier: Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the lessons that we can learn from the whole affair is that Iraq spent about $80 billion on military procurement during the Iran-Iraq war and only about $750 million of that was spent on British non-lethal equipment? Is that not one of the honest principles that we can demonstrate that the Government strongly stood for during that time?

Mr. Portillo: I believe that Britain can be proud of its record. We did not export any lethal weapons to Iraq during that period. When we fought in the Gulf, our service men were not fighting against British lethal weapons. A number of countries close to us sold tanks and missiles to Iraq during that period. We had in place guidelines governing the export of non-lethal equipment and the Scott inquiry was about the way in which those guidelines were interpreted. Britain's record stands comparison with that of any of our competitors and our allies.

Mr. Dalyell: Did any Minister see Mr. Barrett's letter?

Mr. Portillo: I am afraid that I do not understand the question.

Army Cadet Force

10. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of membership of the Army Cadet Force on the future job prospects of young people. [16847]

Mr. Soames: The membership of the Army Cadet Force helps to develop self-confidence, initiative and other highly useful skills through such recognised qualifications as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and the BTEC certificate of achievement. Clearly, such activities can be of great benefit to the young only when they are looking for a job in later life.

Mr. Thompson: Will my hon. Friend pay a fulsome tribute to the men and women who lead and instruct the young people in our cadet forces? Bearing in mind the fact that investment in the cadet forces and the volunteer reserves is a very good way of spending money, will he have talks with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment about ways of involving more people in the cadet forces and their activities as a way of doing down the drop-out culture?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear."

Mr. Soames: As my hon. Friend can see, the cadet forces are very popular. There are about 130,000 cadets, and the Ministry of Defence has an annual budget of about £55 million to run them. I wholly endorse all the points that my hon. Friend has made. It is clear that the cadet forces offer an outstanding start and provide interest, excitement, character development and adventure. They fulfil an extremely important role in the community. I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that we shall indeed have discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who attaches high importance to working with the cadet forces, to see what more we can do so that the cadet forces continue to be a beacon in the communities in which they exist.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the silly ban on homosexuals in the services extend as far as the Army Cadet Force? Should not Ministers take a lead in this matter on principle and not be swayed by a vox pop of service men?

Mr. Soames: On this occasion, almost uniquely, the hon. Gentleman is completely off beam. The decision that my right hon. Friend announced yesterday was to do with

the fighting power of the armed forces. The fact that our forces have high morale, are extremely efficient and effective, and have great cohesion—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Prejudice.

Mr. Soames: No, it is not prejudice. Anything that could undermine that cohesion—it is plain that homosexuality would do so—is not something that any responsible Government could allow.

Defence Industry (Competitiveness)

11. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the competitiveness of the United Kingdom defence industry. [16848]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As a result of its own efforts, and of the competition and procurement policies of the Government, the United Kingdom defence industry is strong and highly competitive. That is evident in its export success. In 1995, it won an estimated 19 per cent. of the world export market, worth £5,000 million.

Mr. Hendry: Does my hon. Friend agree that defence exports are an excellent example of the British Government and British industry working together in the interests of Britain and of our friends and allies overseas? Does my hon. Friend further agree that half a million people depend on the defence industry for their jobs in this country because its expertise and the quality of the work force are second to none? Is it not the case that if Labour policies—which would question the use of every single set of nuts and bolts—were put in place, those half a million jobs would be at risk?

Mr. Arbuthnot: That is the case. Given the recent call by the Transport and General Workers Union to cut defence spending by £18 billion a year, few export jobs would be available in those circumstances. My hon. Friend is right to say that the defence industry's success rests on a unique partnership between British industry, the British Government and the British armed services—who do a fantastic job in supporting our defence industry's exports abroad. We are well served by forces such as the Red Arrows and the Royal Navy—whose ships go to large number of places.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visits

Q1. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next intends to visit the Ruislip-Northwood parliamentary constituency. [16868]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Mr. Wilkinson: Before my right hon. Friend fixes a date, can he reassure my constituents in Ruislip-Northwood about the grave consequences of the European Court of Justice's retroactive decision today to demand compensation of the British taxpayer for the loss of Spanish fishermen's rights? Will my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister endorse the comments of the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), that the quota hoppers must go? Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will raise the common fisheries policy at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who have taken the matter extremely seriously. We obviously regret the European Court's decision and we shall certainly take it up in the context of the intergovernmental conference. We believe that there have to be changes.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 March. [16869]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is carrying out official engagements in the far east.

Mr. Kirkwood: Let me return to the question of the European Court's decision; does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that the concept of the common fisheries policy is based on relative stability, with the allocation of quotas within member states according to historic fishing rights? Does the right hon. Gentleman further agree that the European Court's decision is most unhelpful—the most recent in a series of unhelpful decisions concerning the common fisheries policy? What concrete proposals will Ministers take to the upcoming intergovernmental conference, to stop continuing back-door access to fishing stocks that are so vital to our coastal communities?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That comes rich from the hon. Gentleman, whose party is committed to giving up the British veto in all circumstances. That is a classic example of the Liberals trying to have it all ways in all circumstances.

Q3. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 March. [16870]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Clark: Has my right hon. Friend noticed, when assessing Government policy, that when it is eventually time to put votes in ballot boxes, electorates reject Labour policies and choose Conservative ones, as they have in Australia and Spain? Is this not a sign of what will happen here? After all, these are recent results, and the parties which were beaten were not socialist but new Labour.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I could not help remembering that, not long ago, the Leader of the Opposition said that he was a fully paid-up member of the Paul Keating fan club. Unfortunately, there are not many others left in that club. The fact of the matter is that, when people have to choose between no Labour and new Labour, they choose no Labour. No leading western European country is left with a Labour Government. I cannot believe for one minute that the United Kingdom will embrace what everybody else has rejected.

Mr. Prescott: Why is it that in Tory Britain in 1996, 1,000 families every week have their homes repossessed, 120,000 families are homeless, and 1,700,000 families are trapped in negative equity? On that miserable record, is not my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition correct in identifying the Conservatives as the party of home wreckers?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Nobody would ever accuse the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) of being new Labour. He is one of the old lags of the business, and therefore, of course, it is not surprising that his statistics are so carefully selected. The fact is that the number of households that face negative equity is down by 26 per cent. since 1992, and the number of people with mortgage arrears has fallen by 16 per cent. in the past year alone.

I noticed that the Leader of the Opposition made a speech today about the need for special help for those with negative equity—that may seem to Opposition Members a very interesting and ingenious scheme. I sent out to inquire whether mortgages are available from the building society movement at more than 100 per cent. of the purchase value of homes on the market. The Abbey National, Cheltenham and Gloucester, Alliance and Leicester and the Halifax all have in existence schemes similar to that which the Leader of the Labour party says that his Government would introduce if his party were ever elected. They are already there. Building societies are doing it. The market has spoken. Tory Government works.

Mr. Prescott *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Prescott: How can the right hon. Gentleman be so complacent in the face of the sheer misery created by the Government's policies? If the Government are so proud of their housing record, why not put it to the test by setting the date for the by-election in South-East Staffordshire, and let the people decide?

The Deputy Prime Minister: This is the Labour party which fought to stop council tenants getting anywhere near owning their own homes. This is the Labour party which has not realised that banks and building societies have approved 13 per cent. more loans in January than they did last June. The Labour party is out of date. The housing market is showing signs of recovery.

Mr. John Marshall *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Marshall.

Mr. Marshall: I ask my right hon. Friend to condemn the Hamas guerillas, who have killed 68 Israelis in recent days. Will he offer our sympathy to the relatives of the victims and to the Israeli people as they battle with this attack upon them and their democracy? Will he convey our understanding to the Israeli Government as they react to this attack upon themselves and upon the peace process itself?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sure that the House will be grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the appalling situation in Israel. I am sure also that the House shares my feelings of horror and anger at the renewed terrorist outrages, which have killed more than 30 people over the past two days in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

I shall make two points. First, it is the duty of the international community to support Israel and the Palestinian Authority in their efforts to keep the peace process on track and to encourage them in their efforts to curb terrorism. We particularly urge President Arafat to do his upmost to step up those efforts. That is a message that we have repeated to him unequivocally since the beginning of this tragic train of events nine days ago.

Secondly, I make it clear that it is illegal for anyone in this country to support terrorist attacks abroad. We are carefully monitoring the situation of Hamas activists in the United Kingdom. We shall investigate vigorously any evidence of such criminal acts, which will not be tolerated.

Q4. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 March. [16871]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sheerman: Can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm reports that he has changed his mind and that he now supports a referendum on the single European currency? If he has, is he aware that the Chancellor of the Exchequer believes that anyone of that view is slightly up the creek?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will be fully aware of the Government's position, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has spelt out extremely clearly. It is a position to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer fully subscribes.

Mr. Budgen: If the Government's proposals to the intergovernmental conference were accepted by the other members of the European Union, would we have any protection against judgments, such as the recent one in respect of Spanish fishermen?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not know whether my hon. Friend heard the reply that I gave some moments ago. I made it clear that we would raise today's judgment in the intergovernmental conference. We believe that there is need for change, and we intend to press that. As my hon. Friend, and the House generally, will be

aware, the Government intend shortly to publish a White Paper on the Government's policy towards the IGC, which the House will be able to consider carefully.

Q5. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 March.[16872]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Battle: As a thousand families suffer repossession of their homes every week, by deliberately reducing the income support system for home owners, are not the Government's policies shamelessly ensuring that in our society, after 17 years of Tory rule, if someone loses his job, he will lose his home?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman cannot square that with the facts that I gave the House recently, which show that the number of mortgage arrears has fallen by 16 per cent. and that the housing market is beginning to recover. He will know, of course, that unemployment has been falling for the past 29 months.

Q6. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 March. [16873]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir John Hannam: Has my right hon. Friend seen the recent Lloyds bank business survey report, which shows that businesses in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset have achieved the highest increase in export orders of all regions in the country, and increased investment and profitability? Will he accept the congratulations of all those from the south-west on those results? Would he like to conjecture on what would happen to such achievements if we ever had a Labour Government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend, who has commented on what is extremely good news for the west country. As for conjecture about what would happen in the unfortunate event of this country electing a Labour Government, we can see, from the facts of what has happened in Europe, what would be likely to happen here. In Spain, nearly one in four people are unemployed. In France, under socialism, nearly one in eight were unemployed, whereas, in this country, the figure is one in 12 and has been falling for 29 months.

Perhaps the other judgment is that of the international investors. Spain achieved 7 per cent. of inward investment into the European Union and France 18 per cent. whereas the UK attracted 30 per cent., proving beyond peradventure that, under this Government, the UK is the enterprise centre of Europe.

Q7. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 March.[16874]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: On reflection, does the Deputy Prime Minister regret his refusal to sign a public interest immunity certificate, given that we now know that the Attorney-General was right all along?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has conveniently forgotten that the Attorney-General advised me about the form of the PII certificate that I signed.

Mr. Garnier: Does my right hon. Friend agree, and will he confirm what he said a moment ago, that the UK is the enterprise centre of Europe? Is it not right that the Prime Minister should be in the far east encouraging business men there to invest in this country, and is it not surprising that they invest in this country, given the burdens of the non-labour wage costs that the Europeans must deal with?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is one of the most satisfactory aspects of the many satisfactory aspects of our economic performance that we are attracting inward investment, which has created the jobs leading to enhanced exports—already at record levels. It has come to this country because the Government's policies have made it the most attractive place to invest. One of the reasons for that is that we have avoided the social chapter, which all the Opposition parties are committed to introducing.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I first unreservedly apologise to the House, to you and to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for not being in my place for Question 2 today. There is never any excuse for missing a question without giving notice. There is, however, a mitigating circumstance that I hope you will be kind enough to take into account. As you know, London Radio has just sacked 80 per cent. of its staff and I was summoned to a meeting that went on longer than I thought, but I do apologise.

Madam Speaker: I accept the hon. Gentleman's apology.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have heard today that the European Court has sentenced the British taxpayer to pay compensation to the Spanish fishing fleet. That will obviously sit ill with British fishermen. You have also heard that Her Majesty's Government will raise that issue, properly, at the intergovernmental conference. The House would like to know what Her Majesty's Government could achieve by raising the issue at the IGC. Have you heard whether Her Majesty's Government wish to make a statement to the House? It is a matter of fundamental sovereignty about which the House should be informed before too long.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Let me answer the hon. Gentleman because it may be helpful. We have heard the Deputy Prime Minister in the exchanges today. As yet, I have not heard that the Government are seeking to make a statement. As the news came in only about lunchtime, perhaps the Government are reflecting on the matter. We may hear something tomorrow.

Mr. Budgen: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I will not take any further points of order on this matter. It is not a point of order for me. I have dealt with it to the best of my ability. It is for the Government to make a statement and for the House to listen if one is made tomorrow.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I call Mrs. Ewing. I hope that it is not the same point of order.

Mrs. Ewing: On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. It follows from your remark that the Government might be reflecting on the IGC issue and the common fisheries policy. I wonder therefore, given the Deputy Prime Minister's positive remark today, which we all responded to effectively, whether it would be possible for you to use your influence to ensure that a meeting occurs between the Deputy Prime Minister or others who are interested and Back-Bench Members who represent fishing industries to discuss the possibility of the CFP being put on the IGC agenda.

Madam Speaker: That is not a matter for me. My point was that perhaps the Government are reflecting on the possibility of making a statement to the House now that the decision is known, so that the House may ask questions on the statement.

BILL PRESENTED

Commonwealth of Europe

Mr. Tony Benn presented a Bill to provide for the establishment of a Commonwealth of Europe, and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 July and to be printed. [Bill 70.]

Part-Time Employees (Equal Rights to Holidays)

3.34 pm

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that employers shall give to their part-time staff either the same holiday entitlements as they do to their full-time staff, or a minimum period as specified.

The Bill will make it illegal for employers to give part-time staff fewer holidays than full-time staff, and will introduce in Britain minimum holiday entitlements of the kind that will shortly be enjoyed by workers in every other country in the European Union.

The Bill does not stand on its own. It will prove to be the first of a number of measures to be introduced by hon. Members from different parties—which, I believe, will demonstrate the general feeling in the House that it is time that part-time workers were given a fair deal and the due protection of law. I thank officers of the TUC and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, who have done a great deal to identify the problems of discrimination in the work place which too many part-time workers encounter.

As hon. Members will know, the number of part-time employees has increased rapidly in recent years. Part-time work now provides employment for some 5 million people. According to the 1993 employment census, at that time there were some 19,000 part-time workers in my borough of Oldham, and some 17,000 in neighbouring Rochdale. The vast majority of those part-time workers are women: nearly half the women who work in my constituency work part time. Part-time work can and should result from a positive choice, but for some it is a necessity. Whatever the motivation, however, it is surely right for Parliament to lay down some basic entitlements for every employee, which should include a minimum period of leave based pro rata on the leave allowed to full-time workers.

Britain is now the only country in the European Union in which employees have no legal right to paid annual leave—

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Good.

Mr. Davies:—and part-time workers bear the brunt of that omission. A Conservative Member has just shouted "Good": that pretty well sums up the difference between Conservative and Opposition attitudes to potential employees.

A third of all part-time workers in this country—1.7 million people—receive no paid holidays; a few, just 13 per cent., receive less than two weeks. Who are we to deny part-time workers even a modest period of paid leave? As Members of Parliament, we claim the right to nearly 20 weeks a year, during which we have the freedom to choose when to take our family holidays. *[Interruption.]* There is privilege for some, and a denial of rights for others.

The Bill will impose no burden on the majority of employers, who already show consideration to their part-time staff, but it will bring into line the bosses whose attitude to their employees is one of contempt rather than respect. It is a fact that some employers will take advantage of other human beings in the sure and certain knowledge that they can be made to accept not only the low wages that are often part and parcel of part-time work, but the denial of entitlements that other employees expect as a matter of course. That is why we must lay down the basic minimum requirements, and provide statutory protection for employees who are in a weaker position.

Britain was the first industrial society in the world, and, despite the arguments advanced by some hon. Members who have been calling out from a sedentary position, it need not yet be considered a sweatshop economy in which inequalities will inevitably grow. Good employers, who are determined to build for the long term, recognise that they will gain employee loyalty and high productivity only from a work force that is treated with respect and compassion.

As a proportion of this country's total wage bill, the cost of creating a minimum entitlement to paid leave for part-time workers will be very small, and it will of course be nil for employers who already ensure that their part-time workers receive proper holiday entitlement. Employers who are forced to meet the cost for the first time should find themselves amply compensated, if they do the job properly and ensure that their employees are properly motivated, by gaining the benefits of enhanced productivity and staff loyalty, which should be the basis for any successful business.

This measure will not leave Britain in a less competitive position than its European partners—

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Oh, yes?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman says, "Oh, yes". It will not leave us in a less competitive position for the very good reason—of which he should be aware—that, in November this year, the European Union's working time directive will come into force and set a minimum three-week holiday requirement for workers throughout the European Union, which will rise to four weeks in 1999, except, of course, in Britain.

If the Government's current challenge to that directive in the European Court of Justice—that much maligned body—is upheld, they will argue that it should not have been approved by the Council of Ministers, on the basis that it was a piece of health and safety legislation. The Government will argue instead that the legislation affects individual employment conditions and that it should, therefore, have been passed only by a unanimous vote. I have much sympathy for that view, but I have no sympathy at all for the idea that Britain has to be dragged, kicking and screaming, by our European partners into adopting some basic employment conditions for our citizens. It is a national humiliation that we are forced to trail in the wake of our European partners on such matters instead of taking a lead.

This Bill provides and promotes one small aspect of part-time workers' entitlements, but its passage will send a clear message to Britain's 5 million part-time employees that the House values their services, respects their efforts, appreciates their skills and believes that it is high time that they had a fair deal and the support of the law.

3.42 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I oppose the Bill because this country leads Europe in keeping women and young people employed. This Bill is

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

frightening because what seems to be all reason and light from the Liberal Democrats is merely a recipe for bankruptcy and unemployment. The Liberal Democrats make no secret of their love for a federal Europe. They have said so again today. They would give up our veto. This legislation is just another European tax on jobs.

When Jacques Delors said that Britain's rejection of the social chapter—so beloved of both the Labour and Liberal parties—meant that this country would become an investor's paradise, he was right. Britain attracts well over 40 per cent. of all investment into the European Union from the United States and from Japan, and the remaining 50 per cent. or so is spread thinly among the other 14 EU countries. In the past financial year, 38,876 jobs were created as a direct result of inward investment, and more than 51,000 jobs were safeguarded by inward investment. Since 1992, the United Kingdom has made a stronger recovery from worldwide recession than any other European country. Our economy has grown faster than that of Germany, France, Italy or the EU average. The Bill would jeopardise all that. The social chapter would create unemployment and, through the back door, the Bill is simply part of the social chapter.

The cathedral city of Lichfield is not only a centre of light industry but a tourist centre, but I was born near Brighton and went to school there. That town depends even more than Lichfield on tourism. How many hotels and restaurants that employ part-time workers would fail if this tax on jobs were imposed? I used to work in the electronics industry—how many part-time workers who provide specialist skills would find themselves out of work because small and growing businesses with tight margins could no longer afford to pay this on-cost? Businesses would have to employ extra workers if they were to meet the Bill's requirements. How many students would find it impossible to get work in their vacations? Inflation is now under 3 per cent., but the Bill would cause prices to rise and would damage our recovery.

I believe, as do the Government, that holiday entitlement, like other terms and conditions of employment, should remain a matter of negotiation between employers and employees or employee representatives. It should not be the role of Government to intervene through the statute book; nor should it be the role of Government to stand between a man or woman and his or her job.

It is not by accident that unemployment has been falling month after month for more than two years, while in France, Germany and Spain it continues to soar inexorably. It is not by accident that Britain has more people in work as a proportion of the population than any other major economy in Europe. It is not by accident that this country is enjoying steady and sustainable growth combined with low inflation.

Does the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth wish to return to the dark days under the previous Labour Government when inflation averaged 15.5 per cent? Despite the ominous plans of the Opposition to fall into line with the socialist-dominated European Parliament, this country remains the enterprise centre of Europe. The Conservative Government made this country the enterprise centre of Europe, and we want to keep it the enterprise centre of Europe.

For the sake of jobs and for the sake of this nation's continuing recovery, I oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Chris Davies (*seated and covered*): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it appropriate for the Labour Whips to instruct Labour Members to abstain because they are not prepared to make a commitment—

Madam Speaker: Order. I know nothing about any instructions that may have been given—I do not recognise Whips during this period.

The House having divided: Ayes 84, Noes 49.

Division No. 67] **[3.47 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Berry, Roger
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Donohoe, Brian H
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foulkes, George
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gordon, Mildred
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan
Kirkwood, Archy
Litherland, Robert
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Robert
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Liz Lynne and
Mr. Don Foster.

NOES

Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Batiste, Spencer
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Madel, Sir David
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Stephen, Michael
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wiggin, Sir Jerry

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert G. Hughes and Mr. Jacques Arnold.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Chris Davies, Ms Angela Eagle, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Don Foster, Mr. David Alton, Mrs. Diana Maddock and Ms Liz Lynne.

PART-TIME EMPLOYEES (EQUAL RIGHTS TO HOLIDAYS) BILL

Mr. Chris Davies accordingly presented a Bill to provide that employers shall give to their part-time staff either the same holiday entitlements as they do to their full-time staff, or a minimum period as specified: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 10 May and to be printed. [Bill 74.]

Point of Order

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry to trouble you with this matter, but the Deputy Prime Minister visited my constituency last Friday and I received notice only yesterday that he was to do so, with an apology for the short notice given. Was that not a great discourtesy by the Deputy Prime Minister? The real problem, however, is that he was there to raise funds. I am sure that he was not raising funds on behalf of the Government, but on behalf of the Tory party. Is that not an abuse of the Standing Orders of the House?

Madam Speaker: If he was there doing anything other than parliamentary business, it has nothing to do with me.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. You may be interested to know that in the past two years I have had the Leader of the Opposition and the deputy Leader of the Opposition in my wonderful constituency of Gravesham—neither of whom advised me of their visits in advance.

Madam Speaker: Others might be interested to know that many Ministers and Members visit my constituency, and they are always most welcome.

Benefit Fraud

[Relevant document: The Minutes of Evidence taken before the Social Security Committee concerning Housing Benefit Fraud on 6th December 1995, 13th December 1995, 31st January 1996, 7th February 1996 and 14th February 1996 (House of Commons Papers Nos. HC 90-i to v.]

4 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the priority it has given to tackling benefit fraud, increasing success in detecting and stopping fraud, in particular in achieving benefit savings likely to amount to £1 billion in 1995/96; welcomes the creation of the new Benefit Fraud Investigation Service; commends Her Majesty's Government's proposals to step up its measures against Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit fraud; endorses the increasing emphasis on preventing and deterring fraud; and condemns Labour's lack of positive proposals for tackling fraud.

The aim of the long-term reform of social security is positive. It is to enable this country to continue to provide a decent level of provision for those in genuine need of help—without the total cost outstripping the nation's ability to pay. We can achieve that only if we focus our huge budget—nearly £90 billion—on those in genuine need and on helping people out of dependency. That means stopping money going to those who do not need it and are not entitled to it. Every pound lost in fraud means a pound less to those in real need or to reward those who support themselves. That is why the battle against fraud has always been my top priority.

To tackle fraud effectively we need to know how much fraud, of which sort, is perpetrated against each benefit. In the past, nobody—no Government of this country or abroad—knew the extent of fraud. Estimates were based on little more than guess work. I was determined to obtain reliable information. My Department has therefore developed a reliable way of estimating and measuring the extent of fraud. It involves carrying out a survey of a representative sample of claimants of each benefit. During those surveys, investigators are able to probe in sufficient depth to identify and quantify any fraudulent or erroneous claims.

The first survey of benefit fraud was carried out on income support and unemployment benefit. After examining and cross-checking records of each person's claim, the interviewers visited claimants without prior warning. They made up to four visits to establish the claimant's whereabouts. The review showed previous undetected fraud of about 10 per cent., which amounts to £1.5 billion a year on income support and unemployment benefit alone.

The second review that we undertook was of housing benefit and council tax benefit. Again, we found widespread abuse, amounting to nearly 10 per cent. of the money in payment. That costs the taxpayer a further £1 billion a year. Those two benefit areas alone are known to be the most vulnerable to abuse, which is why we began with them.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Secretary of State admit that the process of home visiting to discover the extent of fraud was routine in 1979 and was abolished by this Administration as a way of saving money on staff? Surely that was a false economy.

Mr. Lilley: I think that the hon. Lady's dates are slightly wrong. The big cut followed the 1976 takeover of the economy by the International Monetary Fund after the financial crisis created by the Labour Government. It is far better to do what we are doing and to have targeted visiting than blanket visiting.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Secretary of State should not pass over the issue too quickly. Does he not recall that the legislation introduced by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), with the assistance of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), removed the necessity to visit people to check on their benefits and removed the obligation on the Department to ensure that everyone was entitled to benefit advice to ensure that they were receiving the proper benefit? It was the Conservative Government who caused so many of the problems in the first place.

Mr. Lilley: I do not accept that point. The hon. Gentleman must agree that it is better to have targeted visiting rather than blanket visiting. However, although we have carried out reviews in the most vulnerable areas—income support and housing benefits—it would be wrong to assume that all other benefits are liable to a similar level of fraud and abuse.

By far the largest single benefit is the state retirement pension, which accounts for around a third of total social security spending. The third benefit review, which has just been completed, covered that. It confirms what most of us would expect: that fraud is extremely rare among pensioners. The results suggest that fraud amounts to some £40 million out of a pension bill of more than £30 billion. That is just over £1 in £1,000. Pensioners are generally honest citizens. As retirement pension is a contributory benefit, it is extremely difficult to obtain it fraudulently unless one can concoct a contribution record dating back two decades, which requires some forethought.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: I shall continue, if I may.

The only other abuse that was at all prevalent in the past involved cases where it was maintained that people were still alive after their decease. That is no longer possible because our records are linked into records of deaths. The only problem occasionally arises abroad in countries that do not have such systematic records of births and deaths. That is why we have posted officers abroad in Bangladesh and Pakistan, as has been mentioned recently in the newspapers, to check that benefits paid there are paid to those genuinely entitled to them and cease when people die.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): My right hon. Friend said, rightly, that because a pension is a contributory benefit, it is difficult to conduct a fraud on it. Does he agree that, given the experience of Chile and Singapore, if we were to move our social security system to a more insurance-based contribution set-up, we would make enormous progress, not only in achieving more personal responsibility in society but in dealing with benefit fraud?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend must recognise that our system has the positive elements that he finds present in

the Singaporean and Chilean systems. More than any other country in Europe, we have contribution-funded pensions. Three quarters of those who are entitled to do so opt out of the state scheme to build up their pension provision. That now amounts to some £600 billion of funds—more than all the other countries in the European Community put together.

If my hon. Friend is suggesting that we should do away with non means-tested provision for those who have been unable to provide for themselves, I should say that Singapore's system, which so attracted the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the Leader of the Opposition, makes provision for only about 2,000 people who have not provided for themselves. The rest are left to fend for themselves. I cannot believe that my hon. Friend wishes to follow the Labour party down that draconian route.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend will know that his Department gave me an answer recently which, on the subject of elderly people and pensions, said that the social security bill for unfunded pensions in the UK, when spread between the population as a whole, is £500 per person per year; in the Federal Republic of Germany, it is £2,000 per person per year; and by the time today's 30-year-olds in Germany reach pension age, it will be £5,000 per year. Is not that a good reason for not joining a single currency?

Mr. Lilley: It would be a good reason, should there ever be any suggestion that we do so, to avoid unifying the obligations of different countries in Europe into any common obligation. I cannot imagine that any hon. Member would want to go down that route.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Is not it true that long before Chile and Singapore thought of private institutions to handle pensions and other needs, this country widely used the friendly society system? When we had legislation that required people to have a benefit such as sick pay, the amount that was paid, as a percentage of people's then earnings, was practically higher than it is today. It was the friendly societies that, for example, persuaded doctors to make home visits. They had never done such things before. It was a good way of getting a jolly good welfare system.

Mr. Lilley: We are fortunate in having roots that go back to the friendly societies. It is perhaps in part through them that we built up the widespread prevalence of occupational, and now personal, pensions that gives us the strength relative to other countries in Europe that I mentioned earlier. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Singapore system is state managed—which is why it is so attractive to Labour Front Benchers. It has received a return of only 2 per cent. a year in real terms since 1980, whereas private pension schemes in this country have yielded nearly 10 per cent. more than the rate of inflation since 1980.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: It is becoming rather like Question Time, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman as he is Chairman of the Social Security Select Committee.

Mr. Field: While it is important to stress that no serious group in this country would advocate the Singapore model, in dismissing it, I ask the Secretary of State to be careful about his record. Those who depend on the state pension do not receive a 2 per cent. real-terms increase in their pensions compared with those who are in the state-run scheme in Singapore. On that basis, the figures that he has given show that the Singapore scheme is a better bet for pensioners than the scheme of which he has stewardship in this country.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman says that no one serious would advocate the Singapore system. I urge him to read the recent book entitled "The Blair Revolution" by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson)—who is spin doctor and guru to the Leader of the Opposition. He advocates the Singapore system, although apparently the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has fallen out of love with it since his brief holiday flirtation on that island.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose—*

Mr. Field: The operative word in my intervention was "serious".

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point pellucidly clear. I must now make some progress before I give way again—although if future interventions are of the same quality as the last, I shall be very willing to do so.

Last July I announced a five-year security strategy to tackle fraud and abuse in the benefit system—particularly with regard to the benefits handled directly by my Department. My strategy aims to make the whole benefit payment pipeline secure against fraud from the initial claim, through internal processing and the means of payment, to any changes in circumstances affecting entitlement. It then aims to shift the emphasis from detection to prevention and deterrence. As a result, it should reduce substantially the cost of fraud losses to the taxpayer, saving some £2.5 billion in 1998-99 from all the anti-fraud work carried out by the DSS. That figure includes local authority savings.

As to the benefits handled by the Benefits Agency, my strategy contains three main elements. First, the agency will more than double the number of home visits to check new claims for benefit and undertake far more checks on existing claims. I am therefore asking for 600,000 home visits to be undertaken to check new claims for income support and jobseeker's allowance, and for more than 1 million reviews and checks of existing claims.

If those visits are targeted properly, they will be a highly effective way of preventing fraud—especially at the outset of a claim. More than 30 per cent. of home visits to new claimants since target visiting was established in July 1995 have resulted in action to prevent incorrect claims from being accepted.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady must permit me to make a little progress.

Secondly, we are using developments in new technology to target our checks and visits better. The Benefits Agency is using one of the most powerful new

[Mr. Lilley]

computer systems in the world to cross-check the consistency of information that it holds about benefit claims. We plan to extend gradually the range of information from different sources which can be cross-checked by the computer. We are currently piloting a new system to match national insurance data with benefit claims in order to check on fraudsters who are both working and claiming.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Lilley: I have just refused the hon. Member for Vauxhall, so I must make a little progress before I give way to my hon. Friend. We already use information from a number of other Government Departments—for example, we use Home Office data to prevent prisoners from continuing to claim benefits to which they are not entitled while in gaol. We are carefully considering a wide range of other data that we might use without compromising data protection and our duty of confidentiality, such as data from the Inland Revenue on the P46 forms that an employer completes when an employee starts work and does not have a national insurance number.

Mr. Couchman: On that point, does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that the P46 does not ask a signatory whether he or she is in receipt of benefit while signing that the job may be his or her main job, is a weakness that encourages those who are working and signing to believe that they can get away with it?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point, which I will certainly take into account in the work that we are doing.

Miss Hoey: I am a bit concerned that the right hon. Gentleman has not mentioned child benefit, and I am especially concerned that there appears to be no method of preventing people who move abroad from continuing to claim child benefit. How is that being tackled?

Mr. Lilley: I cannot remember off-hand the rules governing how long people are entitled to benefit when they move abroad, but I can write to the hon. Lady with that information and any further information that would elaborate on that point.

Miss Hoey: Perhaps if I could just—

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Lady wishes to answer her own question, perhaps she will do so in a later speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I give way.

Miss Hoey: It is important that the Secretary of State understands what I am trying to ask. It seems as though, after people move abroad, every year a letter is sent to what was their home, asking them whether circumstances have changed. They do not have to reply to that letter unless circumstances have changed. They may well be living in Greece or Spain—I have gained evidence of that recently—and continuing to claim child benefit. There appears to be no way of checking when a person moves abroad.

Mr. Lilley: As I said, I will follow up that point and respond to the hon. Lady in due course.

The third element of our strategy is virtually to eliminate fraud in the payment system by introducing a benefit payment card to replace order books and giro-cheques for payment through post offices. Invitations to tender were issued to three consortiums on 29 February 1996. I hope to be able to announce the successful supplier of the new system in May 1996, and to see the start of the roll-out of the new system from the autumn onwards.

The five-year security strategy involves the investment of additional ring-fenced resources on top of the money already spent by the DSS on anti-fraud work. In the current financial year, we are investing more than £100 million of extra resources. Even in this first year, the investment is repaying itself nearly fourfold, with extra savings of more than £400 million. That will bring total fraud savings in the Benefits Agency this year to about £1 billion and next year we expect them to rise a further 50 per cent. to reach £1.5 billion.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury recently suggested that my plans to achieve a 25 per cent. step improvement in the productivity of my Department would not be achieved, and certainly not without undermining our battle against fraud. I was delighted when the shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), contradicted him, writing in a leaked letter that

"the advice I am getting . . . suggests that savings in running costs of this magnitude are perfectly feasible, given the opportunities for efficiency gains and the scale of the investment already undertaken."

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: Would the hon. Gentleman allow me to make progress?

There is no suggestion of sacrificing anti-fraud activity to achieve our efficiency objectives. The extra funds secured for the security programme are ring-fenced and cannot be diverted to other activities. Moreover, the fraud reviews enable us, for the first time, to measure the current level of fraud benefit by benefit, to set targets for reducing it and to measure achievement against those targets. We have no intention of relaxing the target of reducing the level of fraud by 70 per cent. during the five-year security strategy period. The essence of my efficiency programme is to specify objectives and then improve our methods and processes to enable us to meet or surpass those targets.

General steps to simplify entitlement, to improve accuracy of initial claims, to bring together all customer information in one customer account and other components of the efficiency programme will all make fraud more difficult, not easier. The programme will enable all our staff to be directly involved in the battle against fraud by getting claims right first time, keeping claims right, and putting them right whenever fraud and error occur.

Ms Eagle *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I have already given way to the hon. Lady, and I wish to complete my speech. In April we shall create

the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service, which will bring together specialised security staff from both the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency. Up to 1,100 Employment Service investigators will join the Benefits Agency and bring their specialised knowledge in tackling the most common benefit fraud: working and claiming. The benefit review of income support showed this form of fraud to comprise almost 30 per cent. of all fraud. The Employment Service will also bring knowledge of fraud risks specific to each employment sector. The combined investigation service will have a dedicated staff of almost 5,000.

I want to give further impetus to our drive against fraud. So I can announce today plans for a series of local anti-fraud drives, beginning in April.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: I am sure that hon. Members support Secretary of State and congratulate him on the credible work that is taking place to combat fraud. However, is he aware that there is no such strategy in Northern Ireland? Northern Ireland may be different, but why does it not have such a strategy?

Mr. Lilley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Northern Ireland Office is responsible for social security and, in most respects, it mirrors what happens in the rest of the United Kingdom. My officials work with and consult their counterparts in Northern Ireland to ensure that what we do is compatible and that no leakages enter the system from one side or the other. I will report his remarks to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is directly responsible for social security in the Province.

Mr. Forsythe *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I hope that I have answered the hon. Gentleman's point, and he may care to elaborate on it during his contribution to the debate—if he succeeds in catching your eye, Madam Speaker. I refer to a series of anti-fraud drives that will begin in April. Each month we will select a small number of distinct areas and focus effort on them. The prime objective of the drive will be to encourage those who have drifted into abusing the benefit system to put their claims right and to crack down hard on those who fail to take the opportunity to do so.

Each local campaign will be preceded by a couple of weeks of intense local publicity, which will warn people that a fraud clean-up will begin in their area shortly. It will remind people that we look favourably on those who voluntarily acknowledge that their claim has been false, set it in order and agree to remedy past errors and omissions.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: I shall complete my announcement and then deal with any interventions that hon. Members may have. Although, of course, we shall need to look at each case on its merits, those who come forward voluntarily would be unlikely to be prosecuted. Even in the most serious cases—such as large-scale organised fraud—where a prosecution would be necessary, the courts will look leniently on a fraudster who voluntarily throws in the towel. Those who fail to come clean will face a far higher risk of being brought to book.

We shall open a freephone hotline for members of the public to tell Department of Social Security staff, in confidence, about suspected fraud—which we will then investigate. Pilot schemes have shown that these initiatives can be successful. In just five months, they have saved £800,000, have cost less than £20,000 and have had 275 successful outcomes. We shall be piloting the use of our powerful new data-matching programmes to target those most likely to be involved in frauds that are particularly prevalent in each campaign area. We shall increase the number of visits to existing claimants in circumstances where experience shows that fraud is most likely to be detected. We shall increase the number of visits to people making new claims to benefits. Bar code scanners will be introduced in local post offices to detect lost or stolen order books.

Trained investigators will focus on those categories of employers locally who are most likely to be colluding with employees in claiming out-of-work benefits and on those categories of self-employed people most likely to be involved in benefit fraud. Where fraudsters who have ignored the chance to come clean are caught, we shall be more disposed to prosecute, if appropriate, and the courts may well prove tougher in those circumstances.

Our local anti-fraud drives will be spearheaded by Benefits Agency staff. They will involve the entire DSS and we are looking to involve other Government Departments and agencies. That will include staff, claimants and the public in a concentrated attack on fraud. I shall also invite local authorities in each area to take part.

I believe that those area crackdowns will make a valuable contribution to the success of our strategy and make our determination even more visible.

Dr. Godman *rose—*

Mr. Frank Field *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: A queue is building up. I shall give way to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) first.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his characteristic courtesy. I do not suppose that his Scottish officials have told him of the recent, highly publicised case in the Greenock sheriff court of a woman being convicted of fraud while being employed at the local Benefits Agency office. Setting that extreme example to one side, will he confirm that the incidence of fraud in the Greenock and Port Glasgow area is very low? How many investigators will be located in Scotland?

Mr. Lilley: I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the serious nature of any fraud involving members of the DSS staff. They are much more likely to be prosecuted than an individual member of the public who may have drifted into fraud, serious though that is. We take those cases very seriously. I have no particular measure of the precise incidence of fraud in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I accept his assurance that it is very low.

We shall target different parts of the country not on the basis they are particularly prone to fraud. Our nationwide studies suggest that fraud is prevalent throughout the country and is not localised in particular areas, although

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there is some evidence of it being rather more serious in central London, so we shall be choosing areas on the grounds of their compactness, among other factors.

Mr. Frank Field *rose—*

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman has had a go and my right hon. Friend has not.

Sir Peter Hordern: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. The figures that he has given for the amount of benefit reclaimed in relation to the number of investigators appointed are so impressive that I am led to wonder whether it would be worth appointing many more investigators. At what point does that favourable ratio no longer apply? Would not it be a good idea to appoint far more investigators than he has so far in mind?

Mr. Lilley: I can reassure my right hon. Friend that the additional ring-fenced amounts of more than £100 million are being used to provide a mixture of extra investigation and information technology that is most effective. I asked my officials whether we could further accelerate the process of building up that work. We were able to do so more or less up to what we considered to be the optimum point. One can reach the point at which one can have too many cooks spoiling the broth or accelerating faster than the vehicle will take. We are doing it at the right pace and I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for making available the extra money.

Mr. Frank Field: The Secretary of State said that it was important to look at London, but why should the House take his announcement seriously after looking at the track record? On 19 January he told the House that there was £10 million of challenge money. When the various interested bodies were taken to the Adelphi six days later, £2 million of that £10 million had been nicked—rather appropriately, as it was intended to combat fraud. It was the total budget. Various groups have proposed co-ordinating their efforts across London—a really crucial activity. That activity is one that the right hon. Gentleman wants to support. I believe that he found £500,000 from his own budget as seed corn for those groups, to draw on the challenge money. I understand that the Treasury vetoed the right hon. Gentleman using that money. Why should we believe the Secretary of State's announcement today about increasing resources when in the crucial move to co-ordinate action against fraud in London, particularly landlord fraud, the right hon. Gentleman has failed to beat the Treasury in freeing his own funds to fight fraud?

Mr. Lilley: I hope that I can give the hon. Gentleman a different perspective. I said that up to £10 million—then we specified that it would be £8 million—would be available for challenge funding. In the context of the large sum that I mentioned to my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), the hon. Gentleman should not think that the difference of £2 million is crucial.

I hope that a co-ordinated team specialising in combating organised fraud will be established. That proposal is still under discussion in respect of challenge funding. Decisions will be made on the basis of the sort of return that the parties concerned convince us that they can achieve. In any case, that is not the only way in which such schemes can be financed, if local authorities see merit in them. I will refer to that specific point later.

As to housing benefits—which are handled by local authorities, not the Benefits Agency—we shall seek to involve local authorities fully in the local benefit crackdowns. Last month, I announced to the House that I have been using the results of the housing benefit fraud study to develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle housing benefit fraud. I have earmarked up to £8 million for a challenge fund, to help local authorities to finance innovative schemes to tackle fraud.

From this April, I am setting more demanding targets for local authorities to detect fraud, with higher rewards for those who meet them and stiffer penalties for those who make no effort. The national threshold for savings for all local authorities will increase from £100 million to £150 million. That is challenging but realistic, and well within the levels of fraud savings that local authorities are now achieving.

The proportion of savings above the threshold that local authorities will be allowed to keep will be increased from 20 per cent. to 25 per cent. The few authorities that devote little or no effort to protecting public funds from fraudsters will suffer increased financial penalties. Any local authority achieving less than half the new threshold will have the penalty increased to £1 in the pound.

I am also establishing from the summer a national central register of housing benefit claims, which will provide a powerful tool for local authorities in carrying out data-matching exercises. It will enable local authorities to check housing benefit claims in their area with those elsewhere in the country, to weed out multiple claims and to check claims data for consistency with other DSS data on related benefits.

The central register will be a major advance, but it will still be limited in scope. It will enable each local authority to make one-off checks of their existing claimants against other data. That will help in detecting fraud, but there will be no direct on-line link to check out new claims before they are awarded. Therefore, the register will not be able to help in preventing fraud.

Direct on-line checks are virtually impossible at present, because as each local authority has its own computer system—there are more than 400 of them—any pre-claim checks can be carried out only by cumbersome, time-consuming and often clerical procedures. The Benefits Agency is developing a unified database for agency benefit data, with an individual payment account for each claimant—but local authority and housing benefit data will not at present be linked to it. I am inviting the local authority associations to join in a study of how local authority systems can be linked, to share information with each other and with the new Benefits Agency computer systems. In particular, it will examine the merits of introducing a unified computer system covering all local authorities' housing benefit

work. It could eliminate the paper chase between local authorities and the Benefits Agency and be a powerful weapon against fraud and multiple cross-border fraud.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend accept the thanks of the whole House for being what I believe to be the toughest Secretary of State for Social Security and clamping down on fraud? Will he accept our congratulations on tackling the difficult issue of housing benefit, where local authorities have different computer systems? From evidence received by the Social Security Select Committee to date, it appears that different computer systems in local authorities may account for the fact that housing benefit fraud could be as high as £1.5 billion or £2 billion—equivalent to 5 per cent. on pensioners' state pension or 1p off income tax. We are very grateful that he is tackling this important issue.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his words of encouragement. He will, of course, have noticed that no positive proposals have ever been made by the Opposition on this or any other issue, and it is precisely to that area that I want to turn now, because no one doubts—

Miss Hoey: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: A last chance for the hon. Lady.

Miss Hoey: Before the Secretary of State moves away from local authorities, will he congratulate the London borough of Lambeth—my authority? Although I have been a critic of it over the years, I believe that it has now turned around. Will he congratulate in particular its fraud unit, which recently discovered that some 105 members of staff were involved in one way or another in fraud, and welcome the fact that local authorities across London are co-operating to ensure that the ordinary ratepayer is not ripped off by people who work either in the council or outside it?

Mr. Lilley: I welcome, of course, any action that local authorities take to tackle fraud, particularly following the sticks and carrots that we introduced to prompt, force and goad them into taking such measures. I welcome the points that the hon. Lady made and the action that Lambeth council has taken in that area. She referred to the long time that it has taken for such action to be introduced. She should apply that test to herself and her own local authority.

No one doubts the Government's dedication to curbing fraud. We have demonstrated that by the priority that we have given it in the Department of Social Security, the extra resources that we have committed to it and the effort and imagination that we have devoted to developing new approaches to tackling fraud.

The Labour party has always been soft on fraud and soft on the causes of fraud. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), in our previous major debate on the subject, said:

"We must place the issue of fraud in context . . . We should continually bear in mind the fact that, in the context of the overall budget, even £1 billion"—

of fraud—

"is not a large amount . . . There is some danger of overstating the amount of fraud in the system."

One of the attitudes of Opposition Front-Benchers to fraud is to pretend that it is not very big; the other is to say that it is not very important. Their attitude to fraud is similar to the attitude of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on shoplifting, who said:

"Shoplifting is just a case of lone parents and other poor people helping themselves to a treat."

Opposition Members see fraud in a rather similar light.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Will the Secretary of State also confirm that, in the same debate, I said right at the beginning:

"I wish to place on record immediately that the Labour party is as committed as any other party or the Government to rooting out fraud. We certainly support the measures that the Government have announced to ensure that the fraud crackdown continues."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 1253-55.]?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for proving that he has the essential qualification for serving on the Front Bench of the Labour party: an ability to contradict himself in the same speech.

On another occasion, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that the Labour party has too long been associated with the freeloader. Opposition Members were anxious to try to get away from that message.

I acknowledge, however, that the Opposition have now, belatedly, reluctantly and grudgingly, come round to acknowledging the need to tackle fraud, but it is no more than lip service. Their hearts are not in it and nor are their minds. I have checked every reference to fraud by a Front Bench Labour spokesman in *Hansard* that I can find and I have not been able to locate one positive proposal from any of them on how to combat fraud.

I challenge the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury to correct me. Perhaps he will remind me if I am wrong about the Opposition's plans and proposals for tackling fraud. Has he come up with any such proposals in the past? The hon. Gentleman is now more than halfway through his root-and-branch appraisal and review of Labour's social security policy. Does he now have any ideas that he is prepared to share with the House on how we can improve our efforts to combat fraud? He may not have found a root or a branch but has he found a leaf of an idea of Labour policy in this area?

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury may be the exception that proves the rule. He may be the solitary socialist with a good track record in combating fraud. The Opposition's amendment harks back 17 years and condemns by implication the 1979 Conservative Government for a lack of activity in tackling fraud in the early 1980s.

But the only participant in the debate who was responsible for combating fraud in those days was the hon. Gentleman. Between May 1981 and June 1983 he was chairman of Islington council's housing committee. In that role he was responsible for preventing housing benefit fraud. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to remind the House of the initiatives that he took to curb fraud and to combat it.

I well remember the hon. Gentleman's period in office because at that time I was living full time in Islington. I remember that it was punctured by a period of Social Democratic party rule. The hon. Gentleman was ousted as

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chairman of housing for a few months. His job was taken by a member of the SDP, who naturally followed closely the hon. Gentleman's record while chairman of the housing committee. He has today issued a statement, which reads:

"To my recollection, Chris Smith was not at all interested in the issue of Housing Benefit fraud while Chairman of the Islington Housing Committee. And such interest would have been totally contrary to the spirit of the Islington Labour Party at the time."

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): As the gentleman that the Secretary of State has quoted stood against me at the last general election and was roundly defeated into third place by me, he might perhaps be somewhat parti pris in his comments.

Mr. Lilley: Is the gentleman wrong or is he right? That is the issue. The hon. Gentleman failed in his intervention to set things right. We must assume that the gentleman won the argument, even if he did not win Islington, South and Finsbury at the election.

The legacy which the hon. Gentleman left behind of fraud in Islington was pretty lamentable. Until Islington council was goaded into action by the measures that we have taken—the sticks and carrots to which I have referred of about four years ago—it did not take much interest in housing benefit fraud. Since then, however, I am happy to say that the amount of fraud that it has uncovered has quintupled. The sum that they have uncovered is £2.5 million more than that uncovered four years ago. That is a pretty good measure of the minimum amount of unidentified fraud that was going on before we prompted the council into action.

The Opposition say through their amendment that the level of fraud is attributable to means testing in the benefits system. That assertion displays an extraordinary attitude. If all benefits were universally available without condition there would be no fraud because there would be no need for it. Of course there would be no need for fraud if everyone received benefits automatically.

Are the Opposition saying that they will do away with means testing and that they will pay housing benefit to anyone regardless of income with no test of the rent incurred? Will they send the equivalent of income support to everybody? A basic benefit, as some propose, might drastically reduce the level of fraud but it would dramatically increase costs to the taxpayer by a multiple of any fraud savings. Of course, the Labour party does not mean that.

When Labour Members speak today, however, I ask them to say what they propose to do if they believe that the cause of fraud is means testing. What do they propose to do about means testing in the benefits system? As far as we know, their only proposal is to extend the benefit system by introducing a guaranteed minimum income. We are assured by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that although the Leader of the Opposition is committed to a guaranteed minimum income for pensioners, he, the hon. Gentleman, is against a guaranteed minimum pension, and believes that the two are in some obscure way different.

The Labour party is unhappy with fraud in social security because the party's entire approach to social security is intrinsically fraudulent. The Labour party seeks to convince the British people that they can have more for less—in other words, that we can enhance benefits and avoid the savings and changes that I have introduced over the years, all of which the Opposition have opposed and rejected, without increasing the costs that are borne by the taxpayer. That is nonsensical. It is intrinsically fraudulent. It is a fraud that we will expose at the next general election.

Genuine fraud in the social security system is a serious issue. It is an attack on both the taxpayer and genuine benefit claimants. We owe it to them to stamp it out. The measures that I have announced today will set record but achievable fraud and security spending saving targets. They will involve staff, claimants and members of the public in local anti-fraud drives. They will challenge local authorities to bring their fraud savings up to the levels of the best achievers.

I commend the motion and our measures to the House.

4.46 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move, to leave out from House to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'notes that after seventeen years Her Majesty's Government has belatedly begun to realise the extent of benefit fraud; further notes that its massive extension of means-testing in the benefit system, and introduction of increasingly complex procedures for the claiming of benefits, have made the fight against fraud more difficult; believes that Her Majesty's Government's proposed moves towards self-assessment procedure will further hamper both the detection and deterrence of fraud; congratulates the many Labour-controlled local authorities which have had substantial success in tackling housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud; regrets the inadequate support and liaison from government departments in assisting local authorities in this work; and believes that successful action against fraud is worth far more than repeated government rhetoric.'.

The Government have tabled an interesting motion. The most remarkable thing about it is that it started life in a rather more interesting form. The Government's original motion referred to

"benefit savings"—

that is, from detecting and stopping fraud—

"likely to amount to over £1 billion in 1995/96".

It later stated that the House

"endorses its future programme, which, through innovative techniques and additional resources, is expected to achieve £1.5 billion of benefit savings in 1996/97."

You will immediately notice two specific changes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Lilley: The changes to which the hon. Gentleman refers were designed to make way, as I wanted to keep the motion brief, for our challenge to the Labour party to come up with positive proposals. We wait for it to rise to that challenge. I reiterated the target of £1.5 billion in my speech. The hon. Gentleman should therefore see nothing sinister in the brevity of the motion.

Mr. Smith: I note that the Secretary of State was so desperate to reduce the size of the motion that he deleted "over" from the calculation of savings that he is achieving in the current financial year. He has given us, as set out in the answer in today's Order Paper, a figure of £1.5 billion as a "target". The right hon. Gentleman has used an important word.

The Government are all over the place on their estimated savings from fighting fraud. The Red Book, issued at the same time as the Budget, says that £2.5 billion a year will be saved by 1998-99. The following day, in his uprating statement, the Secretary of State for Social Security spoke about £2.5 billion over three years, so my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) immediately tabled a parliamentary question asking what the Government actually meant they would save: was it £2.5 billion spread over three years or £2.5 billion in one year? My hon. Friend still awaits an answer.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): For all those estimates of what might or might not be saved, in all the months that the hon. Gentleman has been a Front-Bench spokesman, and in all the years that his predecessor, now Labour Chief Whip, who is present, and his predecessor, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), were Front-Bench spokesmen, what single constructive point did any of them come up with to counter fraud? Name one.

Mr. Smith: I must take issue with the hon. Gentleman. The difference between £1.5 billion and £2.5 billion estimated savings from fraud is important. To dismiss the dubiety of the figures, as the hon. Gentleman does, diminishes the issue's seriousness. If he is patient for about a quarter of an hour, he will receive the answer that he is looking for, when I make eight specific proposals that the Government should be implementing, have not implemented and are not making, to assist the fight against fraud.

The other thing that the Government should take into account is how those figures of savings are calculated. Is the 32-week computation they use in calculating them sound? We need more clarity from the Government on what figures they are talking about, and whether £2.5 billion a year by 1998 is the figure to which they are working, so that we can test them against whether they will achieve it.

We know that, over recent years, fraud and error in the system have increased. The Comptroller and Auditor General has told us so. He has qualified his accounts on income support every year since it was introduced, and this year he said that the error level in the income support system was the highest ever. He identified, as the Select Committee on Social Security has in its report, a high and alarming level of fraud.

One of the reasons why fraud and error have increased is because of what the Government have done to the social security system. They have presided over the doubling of means testing. When they took office in 1979, 17 per cent. of benefit expenditure was means-tested; the figure is now 35 per cent. Inevitably, if one increases the amount of means testing in the system, one is bound to increase the scope for fraud. The Select Committee specifically identified that as an issue.

Mr. Lilley: Would the hon. Gentleman reduce the amount of means testing in the system?

Mr. Smith: The Secretary of State should consider paragraph 6 of the Select Committee report, which states:

"In particular, means tests tend to tax effort, as benefit is withdrawn against rising income, to undermine savings, since accumulated savings disqualify people from benefit, and to penalise honesty."

That paragraph was amended and included in the report by the Conservative majority on the Select Committee. The Secretary of State should recognise that that problem is an inevitable consequence of the way in which the system operates.

Mr. Lilley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I will give way, because it is the Secretary of State.

Mr. Lilley: Will the hon. Gentleman now answer my question: would the Labour party reduce the level of means testing in the system?

Mr. Smith: We are preparing a series of proposals to have a serious benefit-to-work strategy in the welfare system. That will make a fundamental difference to the problems that the Government's means-testing approach has brought to the system.

As well as increasing the amount of means testing, the Government have increased the system's complexity. The replacement of supplementary benefit by income support, the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance and of incapacity benefit, and the development of the social fund, the administrative costs of which amount to 61 per cent. of all the money that is allocated to the fund, have increased that complexity.

Ms Eagle: Has my hon. Friend read the document recently leaked about the running costs review in the Department of Social Security? It considers self-assessment of benefit, having benefit claims decided over the telephone, and the loss of up to 20,000 jobs in the Benefits Agency, but it does not mention fraud. Is he worried that such changes will increase the scope for fraud in the system rather than improve the position?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. The Government are proposing a series of major changes to the Department's administration. We know that the Secretary of State is looking for 25 per cent. cuts in administrative costs over three years. In the wonderful jargon of the age, he calls it a "step improvement", but it threatens the Department's efficiency in the fight against fraud.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): If the hon. Gentleman is so dismissive of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security suggests, will he confirm that he wrote to the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury and said that those savings were feasible, given the scope for efficiency savings?

Mr. Smith: I did not write to my hon. Friend the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The hon. Gentleman has misread his central office briefing. In his letter to me, my hon. Friend said:

"savings in running costs of this magnitude are feasible".

I say just three things in response to the hon. Gentleman. First, my hon. Friend was reporting internal proposals in the Department of Social Security—he was not making his own proposals. Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman had taken the sensible step of reading the entire letter rather than the particular sentence presented

[Mr. Smith]

to him, he would know that my hon. Friend made clear in his letter the dangers and difficulties involved in any such process in such a time scale.

Thirdly, the hon. Gentleman needs to get his English right, because what is feasible is not necessarily desirable. If he reads the "Oxford English Dictionary", he will find that the word "feasible" is defined as "capable of being done"—not as "desirable", "worthy" or "admirable".

Mr. Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge) *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I will give way for the last time, to the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls).

Mr. Nicholls: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has always been very fair in these matters.

Presumably, the hon. Gentleman would have us read the letter thus: "The advice I am getting . . . nevertheless suggests that savings and running costs of this magnitude are perfectly feasible, but not desirable."

Mr. Smith: That is precisely what I am suggesting. If the hon. Gentleman had taken the advice that I gave his hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), he would have read further. In his letter, my hon. Friend says:

"There must be doubts about the wisdom of trying to achieve so much in so short a time."

I also refer the hon. Gentleman to the words of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. This is what confused the hon. Member for Harrow, West: the Secretary of State did indeed write a letter to his Chief Secretary to the Treasury, in October last year. In that letter, he wrote:

"Your proposed settlement on running costs fills me with despair. The impact on operations will be devastating."

Yet, when precisely the same proposals are made, the Secretary of State tells us that they are all for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No, I will not. I have already given way a good many times.

Mr. Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I hope that it is on a different issue.

Mr. Hughes: Is it not a courtesy of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for an hon. Member who has referred to another to give way to him subsequently?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Courtesy is very different from requirement.

Mr. Smith: I would also point out that I referred to the hon. Gentleman because I was responding to his intervention—a rather predictable and not particularly useful intervention, at that.

Mr. Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Smith: I must make progress. I have given way many times.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) raised an important and serious point. The running costs review unit is currently considering these matters within the Department of Social Security, and the minutes of its meeting of 19 October have now surfaced in the public domain. They are very revealing.

It seems that the unit intends to recommend a number of what it describes as "quick-wind savings". It goes on to refer to a longer-term, more radical approach, and to discuss self-assessment before benefit. It describes that process in the minutes—minutes of important discussions taking place in the Department. Self-assessment, it says,

"would change if the onus was put entirely on the customer. Claim forms would give clear instructions on what verification was required. Customers would be able to seek advice about this, but BA"-

that is, the Benefits Agency—

"staff would take no action to gather the information themselves and the date of claim would become the date that all the information required was submitted. No backdating would be involved . . . On changes of circumstances, the change would be implemented from the first payday following report. If the change was to the customer's advantage, no backdating would take place. However, in other cases, any overpayment would be calculated in full."

Quite apart from the obvious lack of even-handedness that is proposed in the administration of benefits, that illustrates the difficulty that will confront many elderly, disabled or inarticulate claimants who are faced with a terrifying system, and with the need to produce full documentation before their claims can even be considered.

Moreover, the system will not stop the fraudsters. They will sail through it. They will know which documents they must produce, and will have them ready on demand. It is the innocent, legitimate claimants who will be harmed by the self-assessment procedure: it is the genuine citizen who will be caught. I believe that the procedure will make the fight against fraud more rather than less difficult.

Now, rather belatedly—after 17 years in office—the Government want to proclaim a great crusade against fraud. We are entirely in accord with their intention; every pound defrauded from the system is a pound less for those in real need. I might add that the drive for accuracy should cut both ways: the Government should be just as assiduous in ensuring that those who are entitled to benefit receive it. Fighting fraud and improving genuine take-up are two sides of the same coin. I wish that the Government would see it that way more often.

Even on the fraud issue, however, the Government are not waking up to the full extent of the problem; nor are they proposing sufficient remedies. They have undertaken two reviews recedntly. The first examined the extent of fraud relating to income support and unemployment benefit. The Government have proposed a number of steps, as they said in their response to the select Committee, and most of them were repeated in the Secretary of State's speech today.

The Government have proposed the deployment of information technology, and spoken of the importance of data matching and the development of central registers. That is all well and good, but it should be pointed out that central registers and data matching pick up claims only when they are made in the same or similar identities; they are not a wholesale answer to the problem of fraud.

May I ask the Secretary of State when all parts of the Department will be able to match their computer records with those of all the other parts? When will they be able

to link automatically with local authority systems? The Government say that they are going to sit down and talk to the local authority associations. Where on earth have they been for the past 17 years?

The Government are also relying on the private finance initiative to fund the development of the new technology. Just four months ago, the firms that are likely to bid for the new Post Office Counters technology expressed considerable concern about the way in which the PFI was operating: they complained about the reams of paperwork, and the red tape that was strangling the processes that had to be undergone. I certainly hope that the PFI's success rate in this instance will not mirror what happened in the saga of the Scottish air traffic control centre. Because of the nature of the PFI, the completion date has slipped from 1997 to, probably, the turn of the century.

Even worse, the Government are now in danger of making a complete mess of the introduction of benefit cards to be used with the new technology. On 12 February, the Under-Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) an astonishing answer. My hon. Friend had asked the Secretary of State

"if the proposed social security smart card will bear a photograph of the claimant and have a memory capacity."

The Under-Secretary of State replied:

"The card technology and security features are a matter for the supplier under the private finance initiative."—[*Official Report*, 12 February 1996; Vol.271, c. 466.]

In other words, the Government are leaving the crucial question of what is to be on the card and how it is to be produced entirely to the private sector company that will be involved. That is not a matter of semantics. There is a crucial difference between having the cheap option with a card, which is a magnetic strip, and having a proper smart card with built-in technology.

A magnetic strip is much easier to defraud than a smart card, but the magnetic strip is cheaper to produce. Which are we likely to get from the private sector company? As the Government develop this technology, it is absolutely essential that they do it properly and give us a card that cannot be defrauded, rather than the one that we are at present likely to get.

The Government have told us that there will also be more home visits. There were roughly 500,000 visits in the past year, we are told, and that number will now increase to about 1.5 million, and take into account new claimants and existing claimants. That is all very well, but does the Secretary of State know how many home visits took place under the old system, in 1979, when the Government took office? There were 6.5 million home visits that year. The Secretary of State clearly did not know that, because he mumbled inanities about the International Monetary Fund in 1976, which is completely irrelevant in this context.

The Secretary of State has also said that targeted visiting is much better than random, blanket visiting. That sounds fine. However, if one knew where to target in the first place, there would be much less of a problem from the start. Random, blanket visiting is terribly useful—it was during the period of the old system—precisely because one often does not know where to target.

We have had a second review from the Secretary of State.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, for the very last time.

Mr. Nicholson: Since the hon. Gentleman has given a figure of 6.5 million home visits in the last year of the previous Labour Government, perhaps he can tell the House—I am genuinely interested—what that Labour Government's record was in detecting and exposing fraud, and how much money was recovered.

Mr. Smith: Home visiting was meant to ensure that there was far less fraud in the first place. It was routine, it followed every claim that was made, and the information that was held by the then Department of Health and Social Security was far more accurate.

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend give way—for the very last time?

Mr. Smith: I shall break my rule because my hon. Friend asks to intervene.

Mr. Corbyn: Should not my hon. Friend also emphasise the point that, in 1979, there was a far more positive relationship between the then DHSS and its customers or clients—whatever one likes to call them—than there is now? Those visits were supportive and helpful, and they also ensured that people who were under-claiming were able to claim. We now have a type of snooper's charter that has no interest whatsoever in people who are not receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that. Under the old home visiting system, the officers were first looking for fraud, but they were also looking for the take-up of entitlements. Those two features should go together in any sane, sensible and humane system.

The Government have had a second review, this time of housing benefit and council tax benefit. The review has estimated that there is about £1 billion of fraud in the system, but that is almost certainly a serious underestimate, because the methodology of the work done in it was seriously flawed. The first flaw was that the sample was less than 5,000 cases, and local authorities, in particular, have raised major concerns about how representative it was.

Secondly, the survey essentially relied on a memory test that checked the claimant's current statements against previous statements. Any serious fraudster would be able to pass the memory test with flying colours, and it was the small fish that tended to be picked up by that survey.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the entire concentration of the survey was on claimant rather than landlord fraud. Organised, deliberate fraud by landlords is almost certainly more significant than tenant-claimant fraud. The Government review said that about 6.3 per cent. of claims by claimants are definitely fraudulent, and that a further

[Mr. Smith]

1 per cent. are possibly so. So, according to the Government's survey, claimant fraud represents about 7.5 per cent. of claims.

The borough of Haringey carried out an intensive investigation of landlords there who were receiving direct payments. It interviewed 1,100 such landlords—the Government could only manage to interview 5,000 across the entire country—and more than 200 were found to be making fraudulent claims. That was 21 per cent. of the landlords who were receiving direct payments. The level of landlord fraud that was identified in one survey in one London borough is three times the level of claimant fraud identified by the Government in their survey.

Haringey is one of many local authorities—many are Labour-controlled, but some are hung or controlled by the Liberal Democrats—that are acting very successfully against fraud. Haringey has 21 staff who are specifically deployed to deal with housing benefit fraud. It has nine officers who, between them, are carrying out some 50 home visits every day, and they have visited their entire live case load of housing benefit claimants in the past 14 months. That record is commendable.

The London borough of Camden, which is next door to Haringey, has been awarded a charter mark by the Prime Minister for its work in countering housing benefit fraud. Recently, it also achieved the acclaim of an ISO standard.

Last summer, the council in Reading saw the launch of its innovative "fraudwatch" scheme by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). That scheme is being taken up elsewhere around the country, and I see that it is now one of the Government's suggestions.

This year, local authorities will save £217 million on housing benefit fraud, for a £26 million outlay from the Secretary of State's Department. That is an 815 per cent. return for the Department. So Ministers should not dare to say that the Labour party is doing nothing or proposing nothing on fraud. In local authorities up and down the country, the Labour party is doing precisely that, and providing an extremely good return to the Department.

The Government are supposedly launching new challenge funding for local authorities. They announced a figure of £10 million. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) rightly pointed out, however, a couple of days later, when the local authorities sat down to look at the facts, the amount turned out to be £8 million rather than £10 million. It then turned out that £5 million of the £8 billion was from money that was already allocated for local authority work against fraud. So the new money from the Government actually amounted to £3 million.

That should be seen against the background of the Government reducing the funds made available to local authorities. Under the current funding formulae, the £26.7 million in the current financial year will be reduced to £13.7 million in the next financial year. So this is hardly a Government who are serious about helping local authorities in the battle against housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud. Why, if they are serious about it, is the return expected from local authority schemes introduced under the challenge funding expected to meet a ratio of 3.5:1, whereas the Benefits Agency itself is expected to meet a ratio of only 2.2:1?

Why in the assessment criteria is speed of effect given a weighting of 4, whereas innovation, which the Government say they are interested in promoting, is given a weighting of only 1? Why, when local authorities want information from the Department of Employment, the Post Office or, at times, from the DSS itself in the fight against fraud, is it sometimes so difficult to obtain?

The Select Committee on Social Security's fifth report is very revealing on that point. Paragraph 8 states:

"We are disturbed that the threat of such fraud is taken far too lightly by some of the Government Agencies we questioned".

The Government are supposed to have launched a great, determined, consistent fight against fraud, yet, when the Select Committee interviewed a series of Government agencies, it found that

"the threat of . . . fraud is taken far too lightly".

All that the Government have done is announce new money that is not new. They have said that they are going to establish a central register, which is a welcome but limited proposal. They are going to go in for a lot of data matching and new information technology, which is fine. They are going to have a series of local drives which mirror what many local authorities are already doing. It would appear that they have entirely ignored the situation in Northern Ireland in doing that.

The Government have also said that they are going to return the number of home visits to a quarter of what they were before they took office. There is, of course, much more that they could do. I have eight specific proposals to make to the Secretary of State.

First, the Government could tell the House today that they are going to scrap any moves towards self-assessment procedures in applications for benefit.

Secondly, the Government could establish a special unit of investigators across local authorities, starting in London, to tackle organised landlord and managing agent fraud. Landlords use false tenant identities, switch tenants between properties and claim more rent than is actually being paid. Local authorities have been asking for such a unit to be established and supported by the Government for the past four years, yet the Government are today still saying that they are discussing it. I suggest that they make a start now, and give the money to establish the unit, which would pay for itself 100 times over.

Thirdly, the Government should give local authorities the right to obtain proof from managing agents and landlords of their right to control a property, to identify the real owners and to withhold benefit if they are not satisfied with the answers that they receive.

Fourthly, the Government should drastically tighten the issuing of national insurance numbers. The Select Committee in particular expressed concern about this matter, but the Government's response consisted only of bland assurances.

Incidentally, the Government have given a series of different answers in relation to how many national insurance numbers are in circulation. One representative of the Department said that 62 million numbers were in circulation. Another said that 65 million were in circulation, but, in a parliamentary answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead last year, the Government said that 56 million national insurance numbers were in circulation.

It would be very useful to know exactly how many are in circulation. There needs to be clarity and specificity in relation to national insurance numbers. Surely it must be possible to have specific numbers for specific citizens—if the credit card companies can do it, for heaven's sake the Department of Social Security can surely do it.

Fifthly, the Department should end the "finders, keepers" rule between the Benefits Agency and the local authorities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): A great deal of information about national insurance numbers has been bandied around, but the Select Committee was given a very full presentation of the numbers and the two computer systems, and the figures were reconciled. If the hon. Gentleman would like a copy of that presentation, I should be only too happy to arrange it.

Mr. Smith: I notice that the Minister omitted to give us the crucial information, which is how many national insurance numbers are in circulation. I am sure that the Select Committee had a wonderful presentation, and that there was all sorts of reconciliation going on between all sorts of figures that the Government have come up with, but the Select Committee was not satisfied, and I am afraid that I am not satisfied with the Minister's answer. We ought to be able to ensure the tagging of an individual national insurance number to an individual identified citizen. It must not be beyond the wit of Government to produce a precise match.

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Smith: I shall not, because I must make progress.

Fifthly, the Government should end the "finders, keepers" rule between the Benefits Agency and the local authorities, because it leads to competition between them for the same fraudsters. It has on occasion led to Benefits Agency investigating officers sitting in court when local authorities prosecute fraudsters in order to note down names and addresses, bung them on to the computer and claim the saving for the Benefits Agency rather than the local authorities. I suggest that there are better things that investigators from the Benefits Agency could and should be doing with their time.

The system should state clearly that the Benefits Agency can claim savings when income support fraud is identified, and that local authority benefits agencies can claim the savings when housing benefit fraud is identified. There should be close liaison and co-operation between the two, rather than the existing absurd competition.

Sixthly, we could ensure that the Benefits Agency fraud figures are audited in the same way that local authority fraud figures are audited. We know the accuracy of the local authority figures, because they have to go through an auditing process, whereas those of the Benefits Agency do not.

Seventhly, we should tackle the issue of postal redirects. At the moment, if they are sending cheques to a particular address and the cheques are being forwarded to another address by the Post Office, the Benefits Agency and the local authority are not told about the redirection of the mail. We should allow local authorities and the agency to have a list of all redirected mail for claimants.

Eighthly, employment offices ought to inform local authorities automatically when claimants cease to claim unemployment benefit or jobseeker's allowance. That happens most of the time with the Benefits Agency and income support. It is still patchy across the country, but improvements have been made. However, there is no rule relating to employment benefit offices to say that, once someone comes off unemployment benefit or jobseeker's allowance, the local authority paying housing benefit must automatically be informed. Such a rule would assist the fight against fraud.

I have outlined eight specific things that the Government could do now to assist the fight against fraud. Yes, prevention, detection and deterrence are important. It is not only the claimants we need to be examining, but organised gangs, landlords and managing agents. Yes, we need innovative information technology and administration changes, but much more is needed than the Government envisage.

We need better support and liaison for local authorities from the DSS, the Post Office and the Employment Service. We need a commitment from the Government to stop making things worse. We need a serious tightening up on the issuing of national insurance numbers. We need a more secure and sensible approach to the issuing of benefit cards.

Above all, we need dedication to ensuring that the money saved by the fight against fraud is deployed in helping people in real need. I am afraid that the Government's belated endeavours do not measure up to the task of meeting those objectives and needs.

5.29 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am grateful to be called so early in the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I did not think that I would be called so early and therefore felt a little trepidation at the prospect of having to prepare a response to Labour's eight stunning points. I am glad that no such response is needed because the hon. Gentleman cited a list of things that the Government are already doing. I therefore hope that at the end of the debate the Labour Front-Bench team will encourage their colleagues to vote with the Government and encourage the Government in their efforts to improve the tackling of fraud.

Although I am quite sure that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury is sincere in what he is saying and is trying to help, his statement on how Labour will tackle benefit fraud was absolutely pitiful and demonstrated that his party is bereft of ideas. Indeed, the fact that it has no other ideas for fundamental change emphasises that the Government's policies must be right.

Whenever I start a speech I always declare my interests, which are in the Register of Members' Interests. Indeed, I have been somewhat critical of colleagues for not having done so. Although none of the organisations that I advise has in any way helped with my speech or anything else, it is relevant to declare that I advise the Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services and the Telecommunications Managers Association. Some of the

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

remarks that I shall make are certainly as a result of the benefit of working with those organisations and knowing what is going on in the real world outside.

Mr. Corbyn: How much do they pay you?

Mr. Bruce: That is also stated in the register.

Mr. Corbyn: Tell us now.

Mr. Bruce: It is a matter of public record. I shall make my speech in my own way.

Whenever any of us talk to business men or others on their doorsteps, whether they be Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Ulster Unionists or any others—I do not meet too many Ulster Unionists on doorsteps in my constituency—people are adamant that they do not want others to rip off the state. They know very well that that is ripping them off as taxpayers and they are very keen to ensure that we work as hard as possible to eliminate fraud in the system.

The man in the street is often somewhat dismissive of people who genuinely claim benefit. People who are genuinely in need of some benefit are attacked simply because of the fraud that is going on. It is therefore imperative that the House sends out a clear message about our determination to find the fraudsters.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the success of the studies. It is impossible to identify all fraud accurately and exactly, but unless we make an effort to measure it sensibly, which the Government have done, the size of the problem cannot be determined and we cannot assess where it should be tackled. The usual Pareto analysis applies to fraud: if 10 or 20 per cent. of the problem is tackled, 80 or 90 per cent. of the fraud will be found. There is no point in spending £1 million if only £100,000 is saved. We must ensure that we spend taxpayers' money correctly in targeting fraud.

Many of the important areas identified by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury are clearly common ground across the Floor of the House. The reports produced by the Select Committee on Social Security demonstrate that we must all be aware of the issue and that we are all very keen that it is tackled. I congratulate the Labour party on not having any fresh proposals, on the basis that it clearly understands that the Government are going in the right direction.

The Government are right to emphasise that we have gone too far in withdrawing home visits and that we must find ways of checking up on people and discovering fraud. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to recognise that there are other simple methods by which we can find out whether people are defrauding the state. For instance, benefit claimants could be telephoned during the normal working day, perhaps after the children have returned from school. It is amazing how many young children answer the telephone and say, "Sorry, Daddy and Mummy can't come to the phone, they are both still at work." Such calls would determine whether people are working and claiming benefit.

Other methods, including letters asking for information, tend to make people who are defrauding the system nervous. If people are asked to give additional information by letter, they think that somebody is checking up on them and decide to sign off, which is clearly what we are trying to get them to do if they are defrauding the system. People could be asked to call into the local office, especially at times when it would be difficult for them to get away from their jobs. We should remember that claimants would be travelling to such appointments in their own time and therefore such visits would be more easily accommodated by a genuine claimant than by an officer who had to make home visits. Those methods can and should be used much more. It is extremely important to use all possible flexibility.

I mentioned that I am an adviser to the Telecommunication Managers Association and I am a keen advocate of the use of information technology. I congratulate the Government on taking their first steps in that area. They are fairly tentative first steps, but there has already been some success. Data matching has been used very successfully in other countries. Australia, under new Labour, was one of the first. Perhaps if Labour had introduced data matching a little earlier it might not have been so whitewashed in the recent election.

The Government have been very supportive of the Post Office and sub-post offices over the use of information technology, and a number of companies and individuals have given presentations to some of our Back-Bench committees on how it will be used. The House might like to know that when somebody claims their benefit in future, postmasters will be connected to a computer in another area that will carry live information as opposed to all the intelligence being kept on a smart card.

Although that system is quite expensive, it is a very good way to check up on fraud and identify people who have lost an intelligent piece of information that could be used fraudulently. As soon as a loss is reported, the information can be immediately entered on the computer and the postmaster dealing with the claim can be alerted. That is beneficial, and I very much hope that information technology will be used successfully by the Department of Social Security.

I hope, too, that many of the benefits gained from using such a system will extend to other parts of the economy. The Government are large users of computing technology, and if they sign up to a particular type of technology and use IT, it will encourage other parts of the economy to do the same.

I echo some of the concerns expressed about the private finance initiative, which is a matter for the Treasury rather than for the DSS. As the guardian of public funds, the Treasury is keen to stop fraud, but it is somewhat over-bureaucratic—if not over-zealous—in the types of documentation that it requires. The DSS is working vigorously with would-be suppliers to get over the problems, but we should be aware of them and ensure that something is done to help.

I should be most grateful to learn how the new incapacity benefit is working in terms of weeding out those who have been defrauding the system. No hon. Member could oppose a disabled person who cannot work receiving help from the state. After all, if we are in Parliament for any reason, it is surely to help those who are most vulnerable. I do not want in any way to suggest that I am against ensuring that disabled people get suitable benefits—the Secretary of State and all Ministers are devoted to ensuring that they do—but it is extremely

important that people who are denied benefits because they have plenty of savings are not allowed to get a doctor's note saying that they are disabled and should receive incapacity benefit. We must carry out objective and sensible tests to ensure that claimants do not rip off the system.

One of my constituents—a vigorous worker for the Labour party and many other good causes—is energetic, is always rushing around and is happy to deal with her work. She often comes here to ask me to take up issues on her behalf. It was somewhat surprising, therefore, that when the Government introduced incapacity benefit she told me that she was worried about the new incapacity benefit. She had been claiming disability benefit for the past eight years, and was rather worried that the Government were going to take it away from her. I was able to reassure her that she had reached the cut-off age, and could not have the benefit taken away. But, frankly, here was someone receiving disability benefit who was, to my mind, as fit and able to work as anybody. She worked tirelessly for the community, the Labour party and many other organisations, but did not think that she was ripping off the taxpayer.

If people can work, they should be on the right benefit and should not try to claim incapacity benefit. By doing so, they may make a genuine claimant think that others believe that he is scrounging because, unfortunately, so many people in the past claimed the benefit incorrectly. I hope that we will hear how incapacity benefit is working in that regard.

I sat next to a number of people from the pharmaceutical industry at a dinner that I attended last night. When I referred to the subjects that the House would be debating this week, the issue of prescription forms was brought up. I know that such forms are not the direct responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but he will know that exemptions from prescription charges are generally based on benefits. A lady at the dinner was quite adamant—as was the whole table—that the Government are not making sufficient checks on those who simply tick the box on the back of the form to state that they are entitled to benefits. They then sign their name, and their prescription is completely free.

I understand that someone who is found to be ticking the box incorrectly receives a polite letter from the health service asking him to send only the amount that he has defrauded the system. In other words, there is no disincentive for people to tick the box incorrectly and see whether anybody finds out. I understand that few checks are made on prescription forms, as they deal with a small amount of money but require a lot of clerical effort. The Government should look at that matter and ensure that people who incorrectly fill in prescription forms feel vulnerable to prosecution. We must, on occasion, prosecute fairly minor frauds to draw a line in the sand and to show our seriousness. We know how much the taxpayer pays towards prescriptions—some 80 per cent. of prescriptions are supposedly free. That figure may be boosted by some people claiming a false entitlement to free prescriptions.

All hon. Members will have had constituents coming to see them about the Child Support Agency and its funding. I do not wish to go into great detail about the CSA, and I suspect that my right hon. and hon. Friends will be grateful for that, but time and again parents with care and absent parents are adamant that the individual whom they must pay or from whom they are receiving payments is defrauding the social security benefits system. Those parents often feel frustrated that, despite their passing information to the CSA, nothing is done about the complaint.

The Benefits Agency could target the CSA to deal with such fraud, resulting in an enormous saving to the taxpayer. In addition, those involved with the CSA may feel that they are being treated fairly. That is important, as people often complain more about being treated unfairly than about not having enough to look after their children. I urge my hon. Friends to look at the matter and ensure that information from the CSA gets through to the Benefits Agency.

Whenever I go to a village to canvass I always say hello to the local postmaster and ask what is happening. All of them know of at least one individual who is collecting a large amount of benefit to which he or she is not entitled. Most postmasters will inform the Benefits Agency of blatant cases, but they too are worried that the agency is not following up information. It is extremely important that there is such feedback.

When I am given information of an alleged benefit fraud, I can write to the Benefits Agency, which then gives me a full, but confidential, report on the case. I am duty-bound, however, not to pass on the report to the informant. All I can do is write to the informant to thank him for passing on the information, and assure him that the case has been fully considered.

An individual's right of confidentiality must, of course, be preserved, except when that individual is ripping off the system. If that person has had to pay money back or has stopped his claim, those facts should be available to the person who originally provided the information. That provides a bit of an incentive; it also prevents the situation from arising whereby someone says, "I have provided the information, but the individual seems to be carrying on as normal and I have received no firm information as to whether the claim is genuine."

I understand that often individuals will not be identified—whether or not they are receiving benefit—because that would break their right to confidentiality. But if there is a genuine case and we are ensuring that people are being found out, that information should be put in the public domain. The more that we put information in the public domain via newspapers, the better it will be for everyone because the climate will start to change. If we prosecute someone, the newspapers pick up the story and print it. We must consider how to get the information to the people.

I wonder whether we should examine one aspect of housing benefit to see whether it might be more appropriate to return it to the Benefits Agency's remit. It is important that the partnership—if there is one—between housing benefit offices and the DSS works well; it must be a seamless operation. If it does not work well and if we cannot continue to ensure that local authorities take action against fraud—as we have in recent years—we must consider the possibility of bringing the issue back under one roof. That is particularly important if the information that is available on the Government's computer systems cannot be shared around the housing benefit offices. It is important to ensure that the system is seamless and that we get rid of delays. People often tell

[Mr. Bruce]

their landlord that they are receiving housing benefit. The landlord then decides that he will allow them to stay without worrying about the rent coming in at the right time as he believes that the DSS will eventually pay. We should be worried about long delays.

I have one final tale from my days of running an employment agency. It is a cautionary tale that my colleagues may have heard before. I ran an employment agency in Yorkshire for 12 years. In all that time, everyone who came into the agency was put on the national insurance system, and paid their taxes and their national insurance. Only once in all that time did the DSS want to come and check up because it had found that someone was defrauding the system—the person had four jobs and was claiming benefit. It asked us for a list of the people who worked for us in a particular week. Some 30 per cent. of those people were working for us, paying their taxes and national insurance and claiming, but the DSS had not discovered that.

Organisations such as employment agencies should be asked to co-operate; they will be happy to co-operate with the DSS to ensure that people are not claiming as well as working. The Department needs to liaise with employers, employment agencies and everyone else to carry out that job. All of us should ensure that the system is not ripped off by fraudsters.

5.53 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) for, like him, I wish to congratulate the Government, but for very different reasons. I want to congratulate the Government on their sheer nerve and effrontery in coming here today and presenting themselves as the friend of the taxpayer, given their record of the past 17 years.

If I am able to keep the attention of the House for a short period, I want to argue why not only the House but the country should condemn the Government for their lack of stewardship in safeguarding taxpayers' money over the past 17 years. In deploying that charge against the Government, we need to consider both fraud that is undertaken by claimants and fraud that is undertaken by gangs of highly motivated individuals—as the late leader of the Labour party once described such groups—to discover what action the Government have taken.

Clearly, whatever their circumstances, some people who claim benefit would happily commit fraud against their fellow citizens and fellow taxpayers. Others are pushed into doing so because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. I do not stand here today to make excuses for them—I have always stood up and condemned them—but I am minded to draw attention to the fact that they may have better reasons for committing fraud than other groups.

Unlike those on the Treasury Bench, I take seriously the fact that my constituents are men and women who are interested in economics and who respond to incentives and opportunities offered to them. That was why it was so important for my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) to draw attention to the massive extension of means tests under this Government which has perverted our social security system.

When Attlee finished the job of implementing his wave of reforms, for each £10 paid in welfare only £1 was paid in means-tested support. Now, under this Government, for each £3 paid in welfare £1 is paid in means-tested support. We all know how means tests operate on human character, especially when there is a scarcity of jobs—given the opportunity, all our constituents would like to take jobs. We know that means tests penalise people who work harder and penalise people who move off benefit. We know that means tests strike at that group of the population whom the Tories used to think constituted the bedrock of their support. Those people thought that saving was important and that such action would be rewarded, saluted and commended by the Government as proper behaviour, not mocked. Those people saw that they would lose out in the welfare state.

With the extension of means tests, massive penalties have been placed on people who tell the truth. Far from having a welfare state that supports those verities that any civilised, sensible society would wish to support—hard work, the search for work, savings and honesty—the Government have rescheduled the welfare state to attack those verities.

The first part of the charge sheet against the Government draws attention to their sheer nerve in coming here and saying that they are tough on fraud. It rams home the fact that, although the Government say that they know how ordinary men and women respond to economic incentives, they clearly fail to comprehend what that means in the welfare state. In addition, we must get to grips with how nasty some people are—particularly, how some of those nasty people are prepared to operate in gangs.

The Select Committee has been undertaking the inquiry not merely to try to prod the Government into some action or to find out more information than the Government have, but, in our own small way, to try to advance, support and invite those members of the public services who try to crack down on fraud—I do not say that lightly, as it is getting tougher for such people. Within the year, people who have checked up on MOT tests have been murdered by those wanting to dispense with the people who uncovered their fraud. If we took the problem seriously, they would be the most prized people in public service. There would have to be more than mere lip service offered: we would have to pay people properly for the risks that they take on our behalf in trying to get to grips with gang attacks on the social security system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury drew attention to the Government's somewhat complacent view of the extent of fraud. It is not just a personal game that I like to have with the Secretary of State when I draw attention to the way in which he keeps revising his estimates of the extent of fraud as he is pushed into further measures. I am pleased that he takes them. Later, I shall underline how honest such an approach is, given that none of us can know the true extent of fraud.

Let us take the example of Haringey, a borough that is serious in cracking down on fraud and not only saying that it is. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury told us about the number of staff involved in dealing with fraud. Landlord fraud is the biggest problem with housing benefit—that does not apply to other benefits—and involves at least three, and perhaps four, times the amount of fraud that the Government imagine exists.

Mr. Lilley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Field: The Secretary of State shakes his head, but if this debates helps in one way I hope that it will be by making it clear to him that he is still not taking seriously enough the size of the problem of housing benefit fraud. That is the second part of the charge sheet. The right hon. Gentleman helps me to make that charge by saying that I am over-egging my case.

There is a third, more important, charge to be made against the Government. They have allowed the national insurance system, which should have been the fail-safe mechanism of the whole social security system, to become riddled with fraud. I do not want take too much time, so I shall give only one example of that.

We recently debated asylum seekers. I commiserated with the Secretary of State on the fact that he had been pushed by his colleagues, because of the failure of the Home Office to guard our borders properly, into using the social security system as a way of trying to control illegal immigrants. I said that I thought that he had totally misread the situation. We now have a policy of starving out asylum seekers who do not get their claims recognised. Before long, the right hon. Gentleman will rue the day he introduced those regulations, when the press wake up to the people who are already homeless and hungry and who are being serviced by charities and churches. Those people will soon set up camp cities. It will go on day in, day out. That will not be a pleasant case for him to answer.

Equally serious is the way in which the Government allowed asylum seekers to build up their claims over most of the Government's period of stewardship. If the Secretary of State had gone to the centre at Croydon during much of the Government's time in office, he would have found that the crucial role of checking whether people were genuine—whether there were real individuals at the end of claims—was performed by two government officials. They sat in their office with ring files in front of them, turning over the photographs and trying to recognise photographs on the applications that might have looked like others that they had seen five or 10 minutes ago—let alone 10 hours ago. That was the check. It was easy for people to claim that they were asylum seekers when they were nothing of the sort, to build up a series of claims, get the crucial note from the Home Office accepting that they were asylum seekers and thereby get their national insurance numbers. That is why we have large numbers of people trading in national insurance numbers.

Mr. Lilley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Field: The Secretary of State again seems to disagree, but time will tell which of us was more right. That helps to explain why, when anti-fraud officers raid some London homes, they find claimants of housing benefit or landlords with 50 or more false identities, each with different national insurance numbers. Often, they have got references through their cheque cards, bills or driving licences. We are not dealing with simple social security frauds; one fraud is reinforced by others, with addresses right across London and beyond. Much of that problem stems from the Government's continual failure to secure our borders safely. We are in an appalling state when the Secretary of State has not only to safeguard the social security budget but to act as a policeman in a way in which the Home Office is failing to do.

Far from having a secure national insurance number system that acts as gate-keeper of the huge budget to which all our constituents contribute as taxpayers, we have a series of estimates of the number of loose national insurance numbers that are running around. The Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for North Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), rightly said that the Select Committee had had a most interesting trip to the Contributions Agency, but he could not give us the crucial information on how many national insurance numbers are loose in the system. I will return to how crucial that point is, if I can keep the attention of the House, when I consider a programme for reform.

The last part of the charge sheet involves the lack of any overall drive from the very top in Government which recognises how serious the issue is. It is not only a matter of social security because, as I have tried to illustrate, the frauds do not come in nice little boxes.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman constantly talks about national insurance numbers being loose in the system. I was sorry that he was not able to attend the presentation in Newcastle last week, but I offer it to him as well. What on earth does he mean by "loose in the system"? The numbers are accounted for.

Mr. Field: We are now into the world of Alice in Wonderland. The Government have given two estimates of the total number. They say that there are two different systems. Ministers do not understand what a giveaway it is to say that there are two totals because there are two systems. We are trying to a develop a safe system of entry into our social security system. We have various explanations of why some of those numbers exist. The numbers far exceed the working population. Some people have died or moved abroad and we have to keep their files open. Those are reasons for having more national insurance numbers than people in the working population, but they do not show whether the number is X million, X plus 2 million or X plus 3 million. The Minister has not answered the crucial question: why is there not a single total?

Mr. Heald: There are two computer systems. The NIRS computer, or national insurance recording system, lists all the national insurance contributions that are paid and keeps those contribution records. There are 63.6 million records on it. We keep the records of people who have died, because their wives may wish to claim. People who have gone abroad may wish to make a claim in the future. We need their insurance records. We tag records if they are inactive.

The other system, the departmental central index or DCI system, has on it all the people who are claiming benefits. Some of them have a national insurance number but never make contributions. There are people who have never paid national insurance contributions who are entitled to benefits such as people with category D pensions. There are 77 million numbers on that computer system. The difference is simply explained: it is the difference between those whose contribution records have been kept and those who are entitled to claim benefits, some of whom never paid national insurance contributions. I can give the hon. Gentleman the fullest

[Mr. Heald]

possible breakdown. I can account for it. If he had attended the presentation in Newcastle, our staff would have been only too willing to do that.

Mr. Field: I did not attend the presentation, because I was sick. I feel sick whenever I deal with fraud. I am extremely angry that taxpayers in my constituency are being ripped off by fraud and that it is so difficult to get the Government to take the issue seriously. The Under-Secretary may believe that the system is foolproof, but when I am visiting the Benefits Agency in Newcastle perhaps he would like to accompany the London anti-fraud squad on its patrols.

Mr. Heald: In London?

Mr. Field: The Under-Secretary would not have to travel any distance. He might explain how he can be complacent when that squad discovers people claiming housing benefit who have 50 or 76 false identities with live national insurance numbers.

Mr. Heald: The Government are not complacent: we have introduced a range of measures to toughen the system. The hon. Gentleman will concede that in the case to which he referred the police, the Benefits Agency and the local authority co-operated to catch those concerned.

Mr. Field: Precisely. That is an example of how easy it is for people to attain not just the odd national insurance number but fistfuls of them.

Mr. Heald: We caught them.

Mr. Field: Ministers did not catch them. They were caught by officers in the field. Those officers are investigating such cases, despite the difficulties they face in attracting and maintaining staff in light of the present subsidy arrangement. When the number of unemployed falls, Ministers say, "We have created more jobs." When unemployment rises, Ministers say, "It is the world economy; entrepreneurial skills are failing." We all know that the Government like to acknowledge success and ignore failure. I am simply advocating more, rather than fewer, successes.

Ministers should be horrified and shamed by the fact that anti-fraud officers can find people who have national insurance numbers which can be activated against other forms of identity, such as birth certificates. The Government should renew their efforts to combat fraud rather than maintaining that the national insurance number system—which has two computers producing two different results—is safe in Treasury hands. The clear evidence is that it is not.

I am glad that the Under-Secretary is present because, before he intervened, I was saying that the centre of Government must take the issue seriously. Today we are debating fraud in the DSS and we are not discussing neat little frauds which occur only in that Department—we are up against some very serious criminals who operate in both the public and the private sectors. If insurance companies had been included in the raid to which I referred, we would have found that people had made an extraordinary number of claims to the private sector about all sorts of policies.

Some time ago, I tabled a question to the Prime Minister asking him whether he was taking the lead in co-ordinating the Government's anti-fraud campaign. Given the level of fraud that I suspect is in the system, it seems absurd that the Government should go through their yearly exercise of trying—and failing—to control public expenditure when part of that very large public expenditure budget is being stolen. I believe that those two points are related.

The Prime Minister referred my question to the Secretary of State who referred it to the Under-Secretary. We all must start somewhere in Government, and I mean no disrespect to the Under-Secretary. However, I believe that that is a visible sign of how seriously the centre of Government treats the issue. Instead of dealing with the problem himself, the Prime Minister thought that it was more appropriate for one of his most junior Ministers to do so. I do not mean to be personal.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): The hon. Gentleman is.

Mr. Field: I have said already that we all must start somewhere. Many hon. Members—including some of my colleagues—would be delighted to have the Under-Secretary's job. We are all aware of the hierarchy: Prime Ministers and Secretaries of State like to keep certain issues to themselves, while pushing other issues down through the Department for others to deal with. We all know that that occurs. The Prime Minister's actions in that case say something about the Government's priorities—what they think is important. I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary on the Treasury Bench tonight; I am simply saying that it tells us something about the Prime Minister's thoughts on the issue. We must change his views.

Mr. Lilley: For the sake of the record, I remind the House that both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his predecessor held the same position as my hon. Friend at the beginning of their careers. It is an extremely distinguished and prominent post. As a result, the Prime Minister takes a great interest in those subjects and he discusses them frequently with me and my team. It is a perfectly normal, if not the invariable, practice for Prime Ministers to pass questions of a departmental nature to the Departments concerned. I see the answer to every question emanating from my Department.

Mr. Field: I am pleased to be reminded of where previous Prime Ministers began their careers. When the Secretary of State next meets his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he should tell him to watch his back if the Under-Secretary ever has toothache.

I am attempting to draw attention to the need to change the culture of addressing fraud. That is illustrated partly in the disputes between the Benefits Agency and local authorities, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred. It shows that the Government are more interested—perhaps naturally—in meeting their target than in combating fraud.

That is evident in the difficulty that the Secretary of State is having spending his challenge money. In light of today's debate, I hope that he will receive a letter from

the Treasury saying that the initiative in London to co-ordinate a campaign against fraud should go ahead. I hope that the seed money from his Department, which will be added to the challenge money, will be forthcoming. That is not a minor point. The Treasury has sensibly laid down returns on the use of that money. That is all right if there is existing machinery, as one can hit the ground running on day one. However, it takes time to set up new machinery and there are clear difficulties in meeting the returns on challenge money if one is starting from scratch rather than building on existing framework. They are the charges that are levelled against the Government.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way—as I am a taxpayer who does not claim benefit in his constituency, I am sure that he will forgive me for intervening. I am puzzled about his rather virulent attack on means-tested benefits. If he is advocating their abolition, that would mean either that the benefits would be devalued if they were spread more widely or that the Treasury would pay much more. Has the hon. Gentleman costed that idea? Would it have any effect on fraud? He knows as well as I do that fraud has been refined into an art form in our part of the world.

Mr. Field: I bring a certain amount of anger to the debate partly because of what some of my constituents have taught me: I am angry that they must work the system rather than work with the system and I am angry that others, who are not much better placed, must foot the bill. Any solution will take time, but the Government must make a commitment to prevent the spread of means testing. How they do that is important and it will cost money in the short term. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who has left the Chamber, referred to the fact that the self-employed are much more effective in policing their organisations than are companies that belong to the state.

Mr. Nicholls: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says about means testing and I concede that means-testing benefits has implications for fraud. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as about 89 per cent. of contributors towards tax are basic rate taxpayers, if benefits are not means-tested, in many cases the working poor would pay non-means-tested benefits to people such as me and the hon. Gentleman, who do not need them? Whatever complications are inherent in means testing, although it is an imperfect instrument it is the only instrument for getting benefits to people who need them and not giving them in a blanket way to people such as the hon. Gentleman and me, who do not.

Mr. Field: I hope that we will hold a debate on wider-scale reform another time, when I can deploy arguments about how means testing—targeting in the way that the hon. Gentleman has just said—often fails to achieve the intended goal. One sees that most clearly with unemployment benefit.

There are increasing numbers of no-wage households with two, three or four wage earners. One reason is that once the senior partner—the main breadwinner—loses his job and then falls out of credit for unemployment benefit, it does not pay the wife to work because the benefit system pays the household more. A wife earning £100 a week when income support and housing benefit offer £150 a week has to be of extraordinary courage and resolve not to choose to be £50 a week better off. Many of our constituents choose not to be better off in that way, but we cannot blame constituents who, acting like rational economic men and women, take the better deal.

Mr. Nicholls: Does the hon. Gentleman agree—he is probably the only Opposition Member who would have the courage to admit this if he does—that he makes a powerful case for deciding that no one should ever be paid more on benefit than he or she would be capable of earning in the local job market if there were a job for a person of their skills? The hon. Gentleman is opening up a debate about whether we should reduce benefit so much that people with ordinary skills and talents are capable of earning more than they could ever get on benefit. That is a dangerous line of argument; it seems that the hon. Gentleman is going down that path.

Mr. Field: No, I am not. I hope that we shall debate that subject before too long, but briefly, if we were to rebuild an insurance system for which one had to pay, the system should give incentives to people to take work, to take risks, to keep partners in work and so on. That would have a lower net cost, for them as contributors and generally for us as taxpayers, than the morass that we are in. Sadly, £1 of means-tested benefit helps generate the next £1 of means-tested benefit because it is so difficult, once one is on means-tested support, to disengage oneself and get off it, especially given what has happened to the bottom end of the job market.

Average wages for re-entry jobs are at or below a quarter of median earnings; they are £56 a week or less. It is difficult not to be better off on benefit when wages are so low. We need a benefit system that encourages people to take the risk that is often involved in accepting a job so that their wives and other family members can continue in work and the family is not brought down on to means-tested assistance, from which it is so difficult to escape.

The House will forgive me if I do not continue to argue that case. I hope that we have a chance to do so in future. In the second half of this brief contribution, I shall list the proposals that I should make if we had a Government who were serious about fraud.

First, the highest priority should be given to delivering to taxpayers a safe national insurance system. It was significant, was it not, that there was no mention of such a programme in the wonderful unveiling today of yet more measures to tackle fraud?

Secondly, there should be a determined attempt, from the Prime Minister downwards, to change the national culture from one that often turns a blind eye to fraud to one that opposes fraud, so that are not talking, as the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) did earlier, about whether people should report people who were committing fraud; there would be no question about it.

Thirdly, there would be a Secretary of State who was anxious to support his own fraud teams and—equally important—the local authority fraud teams in a way that enabled them to plan long term. Obviously there are difficulties because, if one gives things too easily to people, we well know that they will settle down to an easy life. I accept the stick-and-carrot approach that the Secretary of State has deployed for some time with local

[Mr. Field]

authorities, but to attract high-quality staff, some of whom will risk their physical safety, it is important to offer contracts that extend beyond one year during which the Secretary of State will judge whether one's subsidy will continue or not.

Fourthly, if the Government were really serious about tackling fraud, maximum flexibility would be shown in the deployment of funds to counter fraud. The example cited earlier of the London initiative that was stopped by the Treasury would be the first and last example of that to be exchanged across the Dispatch Box.

Fifthly, to obtain widespread public support against fraud, we might use the savings made in tackling fraud to finance a better welfare state. Instead of announcing cuts, more cuts and yet more cuts, the Secretary of State would win the support of his colleagues to say, "I believe that the issue has been much underestimated. This is the sort of delivery that we believe we can make. We want to spend a fair share of that on improving welfare for the most vulnerable members of our community."

That brings me to my last suggestion. If we want voters to take the matter seriously, the Secretary of State should not only make announcements about new anti-fraud campaigns but place equal emphasis on the fact that the Department's second duty is to ensure that all those who are entitled to benefit gain the benefits to which, by law, they are entitled.

It has not been said so far that, even on the Secretary of State's estimate of fraud, in all probability a larger sum is left in the Treasury by those who are poor and who do not claim. If the Government were serious about tackling fraud—on which they must do much better—and if they were humane in their approach to the issue, Ministers would never speak at the Dispatch Box about anti-fraud measures without speaking about measures to ensure that the millions of claimants who do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled were similarly helped.

6.27 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on social security fraud. I start by placing on record my congratulations to the Government on the initiatives that they have taken to combat bogus claims for benefit and on the new measures that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined earlier. My right hon. Friend reminded us that fraud, which cheats the needy and deprives of benefit those who have a genuine claim, also cheats the hard-pressed taxpayer, who must find the money to fund bogus claims.

I am pleased to say that Broxbourne borough council, which covers most of my constituency in Hertfordshire and serves a population of about 83,000 people, takes housing and council tax benefit fraud very seriously. Since the Government's action against fraud initiative was introduced in 1994, the council has set up an investigation and recovery section, which tackles the difficult task of fraud investigation and debt recovery. The section conducts inquiries and has a good working relationship with various agencies, such as the police, the Department of Social Security fraud inspectors and the Benefits Agency. The Government's scheme focuses on the savings to the public purse that follow from tackling fraud—a system of penalties and incentives to reward authorities that achieve target levels of savings, as set out by the Department of Social Security.

In the first 11 months of 1995-96, Broxbourne borough council identified weekly benefit savings of £381,324 against the target of £90,205. The council has earned £64,171 in cash bonuses, identified £76,835 of fraudulent overpayment and recovered £40,333 so far. It has also recovered seven council houses and flats that were bought fraudulently.

When the scheme was first established, there were suspicions that the work would become more difficult once the easy cases had been tackled, but that has not been the case—there is no shortage of work. Fraud is found in 52 per cent. of the cases that are referred to the council by the public or by the council's housing benefits administration contractor. The total case load so far this year is 456, or 4.3 per cent. of the total of 10,419 housing and council tax benefit claims.

The incentive to tackle benefit fraud is welcomed by everyone, but one must ask: if the scale of benefit fraud is so high in a small and mainly suburban area of the home counties, what is it in inner cities? Broxbourne borough council's work has uncovered a possible sub-culture of benefit abuse, including a number of cases of organised landlord fraud—which is difficult to prove.

The London boroughs fraud investigators group recently gave a presentation to the Conservative social security committee—of which I am chairman—and drew to our attention a number of concerns, one of which was organised housing benefit fraud. The income support rate for a single person is currently £45.70, but, in a large city such as London, many landlords charge a single person two or three times that amount because of the nature of the housing market, so housing benefit fraud can be much more lucrative than income support fraud.

It is claimed that organised housing benefit fraud is much more likely to be perpetrated by managing agents or landlords than by claimants. While some claimants perpetrate organised housing benefit fraud—and make or use forged documents to do so—landlords often need to collude to be successful. Managing agents and landlords have a ready-made base of addresses that they control or own from which to perpetrate the fraud. A minimum requirement is for housing benefit claims to be substantiated by means of proof of rent and tenancy, which would be signed by the landlord.

If further action is taken to verify the claim, the landlord might be asked to confirm the details that have been given. In addition, housing benefit can be paid direct to the landlord—indeed, some landlords insist on it. In such cases, landlords often control the claim: the forms are completed in the landlord's handwriting and give the landlord's authority to discuss the claim direct with the local authority benefits section and the landlord sends in the claim form and rings up the benefit section with queries about the claim. Most cases of organised housing benefit fraud involve claims where the benefit is paid direct to the landlord or to the managing agent. Landlords will insist that the person who is claiming is living at the stated address—they would, wouldn't they—because they would lose a considerable amount of housing benefits if they did not. When visits are made to check residency, there is often no reply—but that, in itself, may prove little. Those concerned could always be out, so repeated visits should be made at different times of the day and on different days of the week.

Often, landlords use false identities or seek out real tenants who speak or write very little English. There are several advantages to them in doing so—real tenants of that type are unlikely to be aware of their housing or benefit rights, there is an apparently good reason for the managing agent or landlord completing the benefit claim forms, the managing agent or landlord is better able to tell the tenant or the claimant what to do best to suit his financial advantage and the landlord can accuse anyone of racism if they seek to investigate the claim. I understand that that is frequently done.

The frauds are usually worked in two ways. First, a completely fictitious identity is set up—which is not too difficult if the type of identity chosen is of an asylum seeker or person from abroad. In this type of a case, it is difficult to prove beyond reasonable doubt that a person does not exist, so while it may be possible to cease a claim, it is harder to prosecute for fraud. The second way in which fraud is perpetrated initially involves real people. The managing agents move claimants on to another of their properties, often in another borough, so that the borough's computer will not show up two claims as soon as the claim is put into payment. They then ensure that a new claim is put in for the new address, while they knowingly continue to receive payments for the address the tenants have left. New real tenants will, in all likelihood, already be claiming from the first address.

Moneys obtained from benefit fraud are often used to fund mortgage fraud. Managing agents, only controlling other people's properties, seek to build themselves into property-owing landlords. This is a serious problem. It is serious financial crime—far different from the image of benefit fraud. For example, a managing agent who controls, say, 30 properties containing bedsits might be able to charge an average of £70 per week per bedsit, with four bedsits per property. The experience of investigators in London is that fraudulent managing agents will operate the fraud in between 35 and 50 per cent. of the properties that they control. That means that they will fraudulently obtain between £2,940 and £4,200 a week—and many control more than 30 properties. Practitioners estimate that, across London, as much as £40 million a year may be fraudulently obtained in that way.

London local authorities must face up to the problem and take appropriate steps to tackle it. I should mention, however, that the Labour party's proposals, which we heard this afternoon, are not original. I am aware that those working in the field, such as the London boroughs fraud investigators group, favour the creation of a specialist team of investigators who would mirror the Benefits Agency multiple claims team's work on organised income support fraud. An organised housing benefit fraud team in London could work alongside the multiple claims team, where appropriate, and link up with investigations into other types of fraud against local authorities in London via the London team against fraud.

The London boroughs fraud investigators group also argues for changes to the housing benefit regulations, first, to give local authorities the right to obtain proof from managing agents and landlords of their right to control a property and of the real owner's identity as a condition of putting a claim into payment where benefit is to be paid directly to the landlord and, secondly, to give local authorities the right to refuse to put a case into payment to the managing agent or landlord where there is a refusal to provide information requested or where there is a reasonable suspicion of fraud.

I hope that the measures that the Government have proposed today will address those concerns and give further support to local authorities to prevent and deter organised housing benefit fraud. There is no doubt that serious financial crime is taking place. The benefits system, which is designed to benefit the poorer sections of society, is being exploited by some managing agents and landlords to enrich themselves and to build property portfolios. Serious and speedy action needs to be taken, and I hope that the Government will address those issues quickly.

6.41 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): There is no question but that benefit fraud is a huge problem in Britain today. Only now is the real size and extent of the problem coming to light. I find it incredible that, before last year, the Government had not conducted a survey on the extent of benefit fraud in Britain.

Mr. Heald: Britain was the first country in the world to do it. Was the hon. Lady suggesting it?

Ms Lynne: Yes. All hon. Members have been suggesting that we should find out how much benefit fraud has been going on. The Government have had 17 years to carry out such a survey, yet only last year did the Department of Social Security actually decide to do so.

Mr. Heald: It was our idea.

Ms Lynne: The hon. Gentleman said that it was their idea, but the Government he supports have had 17 years to implement it. According to the first major survey by the DSS of income support and unemployment benefit fraud, £1.4 billion a year has been wasted and one in 10 claims is fraudulent. When we add the £546 million that is overpaid in income support alone—mainly due to official error—it is clear that there is an enormous waste of taxpayers' money.

This year, there was another Department of Social Security survey, which I welcome. I welcome the fact that, at long last, the Government are doing something about benefit fraud. The survey stated that £1 billion in housing benefit is wasted through benefit fraud—for which the taxpayer is paying—and that one in five housing benefit claims is fraudulent.

The fight has only just started. Most people think that benefit fraud is mainly down to individuals, but a survey in the January edition of *Computing* magazine estimated that overall benefit fraud was in the region of £5 billion and that organised gangs and terrorist organisations accounted for £1 billion of computerised benefit losses. I do not know how accurate the *Computing* survey was, but it is certainly interesting to consider that the extent of benefit fraud could be as much as £5 billion. None the less, we have to accept that criminals are not only ripping off the taxpayer, but financing further criminal activity.

Benefit fraud is a huge problem, but what is the way forward? We have to consider several possible solutions and look at the operation of the agencies and local councils. A parliamentary answer stated that theft in the Department of Social Security had quadrupled from the 1993-94 figure of £222,000 to £850,000 in 1995 and that housing benefit fraud was occasionally—although it is not widespread—down to local government employees.

[Ms Lynne]

The co-ordinator of the local authority investigation officers group said that 20 per cent. of housing benefit fraud could be internal. I do not know how accurate the surveys are, but we must take them into account. The Minister shakes his head. I should be grateful if he would tell us whether he agrees with the estimate that 20 per cent. of housing benefit fraud is internal.

We have only to look at what happened in Lambeth under the Labour-controlled council. In January, when the council was under no overall control, more than 100 council staff were involved in a crackdown and anti-fraud measures were introduced. They faced accusations that they had been making fraudulent claims in housing benefit and income support. The workers were not the only ones involved. On 21 March, there will be a by-election in Lambeth because the deputy leader of the Tory group pleaded guilty to defrauding the council of housing benefit.

Local councils face a difficult problem, because many claimants move between different council areas. There is no way of checking on whether they are already claiming in another council area. Individual councils cannot address that difficulty alone, so I welcomed the announcement the Secretary of State made in January—whatever the figure is, whether it is £10 million or £8 million—that the Government are providing money to help local councils tackle those problems. I hope that they look into other such measures.

Hopefully—I say hopefully as the Secretary of State seemed unsure about when it might happen—a national register of council tax and housing benefit will be set up so that data matching by councils can be undertaken on a national basis. It has my full support, but it must be carefully monitored to ensure that confidential information is protected.

In answer to my recent parliamentary question about how those working in different benefit organisations had improperly used confidential information, I was informed that two employees in the Benefits Agency and one in the Contributions Agency had been dismissed. The figure relating to the Child Support Agency was larger. Since 1993, eight members of staff have been dismissed and 10 have faced disciplinary action. Although the number is small, we must assume that the problem is wider—I assume that many fraudsters have not yet come to light. The Government already have generalised matching services for other benefits. It makes sense to extend those safeguards to income support, but mainly to housing benefit—but we must be aware of the pitfalls.

Home visits are another way of overcoming benefit fraud. I welcome the announcement that they are to be increased—they should not have been cut in the first place. They prevented many people from perpetrating benefit fraud. I hope that home visits will not be jeopardised by the staff cuts that the Secretary of State announced recently. I hope that the Minister will be able to give that assurance.

The Secretary of State announced that 1,100 Employment Service investigators are to go to the Benefits Agency. Will that represent an overall increase in fraud officers or a decrease? I am not sure of the number of investigators in the Employment Service and the DSS respectively and would be grateful for clarification.

Staff must be properly checked. Were the 100 or so Lambeth staff checked properly? I doubt it. Checks are particularly important in respect of staff tackling benefit fraud. The Government's response to the Social Security Committee report ruled out tighter training and closer scrutiny of staff dealing with benefit fraud in particular. I hope that the Government will change their mind, and I shall be grateful if the Minister will comment.

In another investigation by the magazine *Computing*, it claimed to have seen internal DSS documents showing that, in London alone, 120 staff were suspended for giving information to criminals, credit reference agencies, debt recovery groups and others seeking private information. I should like the Minister to confirm or deny the accuracy of that report when he winds up. It is vital that the situation does not worsen. If the DSS and its agencies fail to protect confidential information, and if some of its employees are on the fiddle, benefit fraud will become more difficult to tackle.

The fight against benefit fraud is welcome and I support the Government's recently announced initiatives. I shall continue to do so, provided that two criteria are met—people should be deemed innocent until found guilty, and confidential information should not be used improperly. It is often said that benefit cheats must be stopped, because every £1 that they take is snatched from someone who desperately needs it. How true—but the fight against benefit fraud must go hand in hand with a tightening up of overpayments by Benefits Agency staff and with encouraging pensioners in particular to take up the benefits that are theirs by right.

6.53 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I warmly welcome the opportunity to debate benefit fraud again. The debate recognises the extent to which fraud is perpetrated and its draining effect on the social security budget. I warmly congratulate in his absence my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on his excellent speech. He more than anyone has done much over the past two or three years, in his time at the Department of Social Security, to raise the profile of the fight against fraud. Sadly, we heard little that was new from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I was particularly disappointed at his reluctance to give way in his speech, after my right hon. Friend entered into the true spirit of social security debates by giving way to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on at least four occasions. I was sorry not to have the opportunity to intervene on the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury because he used one quote from the Select Committee's report extremely selectively. I refer to paragraph 6, on means-tested benefits. The hon. Gentleman said that the Committee criticised means testing, but omitted the next sentence:

> "The alternative of universal benefits, however, would spread disincentives to seek employment and to save for future self-provision across the whole population, as well as being prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, all benefits are subject to fraud."

The hon. Gentleman would have done us all a favour if he had given the full quotation.

The most telling remark was that of the hon. Member for Birkenhead. When the Select Committee heard evidence on 7 February, he said that

"when we announced as a Committee that we were doing an inquiry into benefit fraud, one of my colleagues sidled up and said, 'Typical! Another right-wing strategy from you.' It never struck me that being against fraud was actually a right-wing stance."

Listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, I wondered whether he was the colleague who had sidled up to the hon. Member for Birkenhead, to comment that the investigation was yet another shamefully right-wing decision by the hon. Gentleman. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Birkenhead, as Chairman of the Select Committee. I have been privileged to serve under him since the beginning of this Parliament, and the hon. Gentleman has done more than any other member of the Committee to highlight benefit fraud and drive forward the Committee's investigations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is due to give evidence to the Committee tomorrow. I am not sure whether that means that today's debate was well timed or poorly timed. It might have been better to have waited until hearing what my right hon. Friend has to say tomorrow, but I look forward to hearing his evidence.

I warmly welcome the mechanisms already put in place by my right hon. Friend, to some of which he referred today. On 10 July 1995, my right hon. Friend set out in his paper "The Right Money to the Right People" the extent of benefit fraud as the Department perceived it and his strategy for combating it. My right hon. Friend revealed in that paper, and did so again today, that fraudulent income support and unemployment benefit claims alone were costing a crippling £1.4 billion a year. He revealed that the review's investigators proved or found strong evidence of fraud in one in 10 cases. The largest proportion of income support and unemployment benefit frauds took the form of people claiming while working—a staggering £560 million of the £1.4 billion total. The second largest type of fraud, amounting to £450 million, resulted from people claiming to be single when they were living as a couple.

Those findings combined with others led my right hon. Friend to determine the new priorities for fighting fraud that he announced last July. What has been achieved to date? My right hon. Friend established the fraud strategy group, to co-ordinate anti-fraud work across the Department and its agencies. The Select Committee's fifth report in 1995 welcomed that recognition of the need for closer liaison. It heard evidence from the chief executive of the Contributions Agency that the group was "a genuinely useful forum" in which ideas and information could be exchanged under the chairmanship of a Minister. However, the Committee is also concerned to hear how liaison between agencies works at ground level. Later, I will touch on one or two of the problems that the Committee has identified from subsequent evidence, when further or much closer liaison could have been undertaken between the various agencies.

My right hon. Friend's announcements today go a long way to calming some fears. I particularly welcome the establishment of the benefits fraud investigation service, which will bring together the Employment Service and Benefits Agency in tackling the 30 per cent. of fraud in which an individual claims not to be working when he or she is doing so. My right hon. Friend has also established dedicated fraud teams at local level, about which the Select Committee has taken considerable evidence. I particularly welcome today's announcement that benefits fraud crackdowns will begin by area from April.

Last year's benefit reviews enabled my right hon. Friend to build on the work that had already been undertaken and to institute a new security approach, and we heard a good deal today about that success. I very much hope that such benefit reviews will be a continuing process, enabling the Government to measure the success of their strategy against the initial yardstick. My right hon. Friend's new security strategy has three key elements. Obviously, the first is to make the system secure. I have no doubt that the new plastic benefit card that he announced last year will make a considerable difference, but I echo one thing that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said.

We heard today that my right hon. Friend has gone out to the consortiums that will be asked to bid to produce the new benefit card. I hope that, in the wind-up or at some stage, we can hear a little more about the criteria that have been set for the consortiums. We await further details on how the card will work, and assurances and proof that the technology is proven, but surely the most important thing about the card succeeding is that the identifying factor, whether it is a photograph or whatever, is secure. I quote from Mr. Rob Elliot of the London boroughs fraud investigators group, who pointed out to us in evidence:

"In the case of a photograph, unless all photographs were collated and were able to be compared then I do not think that a photograph is secure . . . Some people might suggest that a fingerprint on an ID card might be a more secure method of doing it."

He went on to say, in response to the Chairman, who asked what we would need if we were in Utopia:

"I would not be adverse to providing both a fingerprint and a DNA sample."

These questions will have to be considered, but it is very important that the identifying mechanism on the card is secure so that the public will have confidence in how it works.

Secondly, new guidance has been issued to staff who are at the sharp end—distributing the benefits—to improve the identity checks that they undertake. Thirdly, the number of checks to ensure that the correct amount of benefit is paid will be increased. Between July last year and the end of this month, an additional 1 million home visits will have been made by DSS officers to check the validity of claimants. It is worth putting on record the savings that have been made. Fraud savings for 1994-95 were £717.6 million—up from £654 million the previous year and a welcome £64 million ahead of target. There is more to be done, however, as my right hon. Friend and, indeed, hon. Members on both sides of the House, acknowledged today.

The Select Committee is currently considering where the war against fraud could be tightened still further. Although it is currently looking specifically at housing benefit fraud, I shall highlight briefly one or two of the obvious areas of concern, some of which will undoubtedly feature in our report when it is produced.

There are discrepancies about the scale of the problem. We heard a great deal today from hon. Members on the extent of the problem, dividing it into different categories for different benefits and how those benefits are prone to fraud. There still seems to be much confusion about the scale and the extent of fraud. On housing benefit alone, my right hon. Friend told us that it could possibly be as high as £1 billion, according to Government figures. Yet in evidence that it gave to us, the Audit Commission

[Mr. David Faber]

refused to be drawn any further than the figures that it gave in its 1995 update, "Protecting the Public Purse", a document that calculates the detected housing benefit fraud in local authorities at just £40 million per annum.

At the other end of the scale, the local authority investigation officers group, which also gave evidence, suggests that housing benefit fraud could range between 6 per cent. in local authorities that are well set up to fight it to as much as 12 per cent. in those that are not—an annual bill, possibly, of up to £1.2 billion that is being wasted on housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the reasons, perhaps, for housing benefit fraud is that the Government's fair rents policy in the early 1980s drove up rents and drove people into a system that they did not really want to get into, but, having got into it, they found that they were locked into it, and in many places locked out of employment? Is not housing benefit fraud very much the consequence of Government decisions on housing at free-market prices in the early 1980s?

Mr. Faber: I do not accept that anyone is driven into fraud. It is a conscious decision that someone takes. One of the things that we found in our report is that the vast majority of housing benefit fraud is perpetrated by landlords. Hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench acknowledged that earlier. It is clearly not something that someone is driven into. It is a conscious decision that someone takes to defraud the taxpayer.

I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was here during my right hon. Friend's speech, but he might have welcomed the proposals that my right hon. Friend made to target certain areas from April and to announce two weeks in advance that squads would be going into those areas. Although I very much hope that no one will think that we are offering an amnesty to those who have, as my right hon. Friend put it, "drifted into fraud", there are some who may have been caught up in fraud. I hope that they will be alerted to that fact and will come off the benefit that they should not be on very quickly indeed.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is not there an argument that if one reduces the number of houses in the public sector and follows a policy of ending public housing building programmes, which we had in the 1960s and 1970s, but which were terminated in the early 1980s, and drives people into the private sector, people would be drawn into the private sector, with high rents, who otherwise would never have gone into that business? If much of the housing benefit fraud is landlord induced, it is only because of the shift to dependence on private sector housing allocation.

Mr. Faber: I can repeat only what I said in reply to the hon. Gentleman's earlier intervention. If people are being brought into housing benefit fraud, they are still criminals. People who defraud the public purse are still criminals. There is no excuse for housing benefit fraud or organised fraud. I do not suggest for a second that the hon. Gentleman suggested that. Landlords go out with a conscious decision to commit fraud, and one cannot possibly condone it.

I repeat what I said a moment ago. I acknowledge that there are those—I think that this was the purpose of the hon. Gentleman's first intervention—who may have drifted inadvertently into fraud. I do not particularly like that expression, but there are people who may be on the wrong benefit and do not realise that they are. I very much hope that such people will look long and hard at what benefits they should be on and take advantage of the proposals that my right hon. Friend unveiled today, where teams will go into specific areas after publicity has been given, and, I hope, will pull them off benefit.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Faber: I shall continue, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

My right hon. Friend gave us an assurance today that the figures in the benefit reviews would provide reliable information. I very much welcome that and urge him to continue to collect definitive data on the scale of the problem—data that can be used and acknowledged by everyone as the true figures. I hope that that will put an end to some of the discrepancies that exist between the various data that are available to us.

The second area that the Select Committee is examining is the way in which various agencies fight and contest fraud, and effective liaison and communication between them when dealing with specific cases. That subject was covered in our fifth report last year on the work of the DSS and its agencies. As a Committee, we remain concerned at the possible fragmentation and diminution of scope for joint initiatives between some of the agencies involved, for instance, where several agencies are affected by a single fraudster. There are two different perceptions of how successful it might be. On the one hand, several agencies will provide different opportunities to detect the fraud in each agency. On the other hand, there is often the possibility that agencies will assume that responsibility lies elsewhere and that action is being taken.

Evidence of that was given last year by the Contributions Agency, when it became clear that, in a number of areas, the Benefits Agency was considered to have prime responsibility for detecting fraud. Yet when the Benefits Agency was subsequently examined, the then acting chief executive suggested that the Benefits Agency could act only if it was certain of its source of information. That is especially relevant to the Child Support Agency, which has not been mentioned today, but on which the Committee has spent a great deal of time in the past two or three years.

I think that we have all had surgery experience of someone passing on information that is supposed evidence of fraud within the system, often involving a former partner, husband or wife. We know that such information always needs to be treated with great care. It is often based on malice, and frequently it is not based on fact. There needs to be a mechanism, however, whereby the Benefits Agency can investigate the information fully, which often may be specifically targeted and, therefore, easily and quickly investigated. It seems that too often such information can be ignored. Alternatively, its true value can be underestimated, despite the caveat that I have already entered that it could possibly have been motivated by malice.

I welcome the announcement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that fraud hotlines will be introduced locally as part of local anti-fraud drives. Too often members of the public complain that it is made difficult for them to pass on information that they believe to be of value.

Last month, the deputy head of the security branch of the Benefits Agency told us that in the previous financial year alone the agency had received over 1 million potential fraud referrals from the public. I think that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said this afternoon that in five pilot schemes with hotlines the outcome has been an £800,000 saving for £20,000-worth of expenditure. I hope that my right hon. Friend might consider extending the system further, if not nationwide. It seems that the money would be well spent if that were to be the rate of return from whistleblowers' hotlines. Obviously, we would not wish to use tabloid language to describe such a system.

I move on to the much debated issue of national insurance numbers. Like the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, I was unable to be part of the Newcastle visit.

Mr. Bradley: Was the hon. Gentleman sick?

Mr. Faber: No, I was not sick, unlike the Chairman. I was unable to make the journey on the specific day.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for North Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), for trying to clarify some of the differences between the two approaches to national insurance numbers. The system is still perceived as being extremely confusing. It is very difficult for some people to understand it. I think that it was Mr. Rob Elliot of the fraud investigators' group who said that it was difficult to do justice to national insurance numbers. He believes that they are not a sound base for investigating fraud. There is considerable confusion over the two current systems—the national insurance recording system and the departmental central index. Despite the enlightenment offered by my hon. Friend, there is still confusion over the roles that the two systems play.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced that his Department will be pioneering the introduction of a single national computer system. Against the background of the current confusion that I have described, that is especially to be welcomed. Similarly, any steps that the Government can take or are taking to improve the security of national insurance numbers, cleaning both duplicate and redundant records, are much needed. We all look forward to hearing more about such an operation in due course, including especially a system of computer cross-checks and the harmonisation of housing benefit computers throughout local authorities.

There is also the relationship between the Benefits Agency and local authorities. The Select Committee heard conflicting evidence on service level agreements and their effectiveness in ensuring good working relationships. In evidence given last month by representatives of the Benefits Agency, we heard that by and large it encouraged locally based agreements with local authorities, and that those agreements are effective. The vast majority of Benefits Agency district offices are happy with their relationships with local authorities, and they insist that local authorities consider that the system works well from their point of view.

In previous evidence, however, especially from the London boroughs' fraud investigators, we heard that most local relationships work only moderately well and that some do not work at all. When the Committee's report is published, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the rest of the Government will consider carefully the obvious discrepancy in evidence to which I have referred and seek to reassure some local authorities. We have heard from the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, about some of the concerns that authorities may have. I hope that the Government will consider carefully those concerns in terms of the Benefits Agency's role in investigating fraud in individual areas.

Today's welcome announcement that a programme of crackdowns area by area, which will begin in April, will give local authorities in specific areas a crucial role. It will be vital that they work closely with the national Benefits Agency to maximise the programme's impact. I hope that all local authorities will respond to my right hon. Friend's appeal to come together to study a unified computer system for dealing with housing benefit across the board. That would surely go a great way to eradicating housing benefit fraud.

I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's announcements. It has been an excellent debate so far. The Opposition are keen on saying that the Government have had 17 years to crack down on benefit fraud. It should be understood, however, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is tackling the issues on which they are asking him to take action. I think that the hon. Member for Birkenhead must hold back some of his more venomous remarks for the Chamber. He certainly lured us into a false sense of security with some of the praise that he has heaped on the Government during sittings of the Select Committee.

I am delighted to support the motion.

7.15 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim): Before us are a motion and an amendment, but I am sure that the House generally would support action against fraud to ensure that benefits are targeted on those who require them and are entitled to them. That is especially the position in Northern Ireland, where consumers face higher costs. Electricity is one example.

Figures have been bandied about on the extent of fraud and how much it is costing. We have also heard about how much will be spent to combat it. The Secretary of State has made various other announcements, which I support and welcome.

I would wish to compare Great Britain with Northern Ireland. When I intervened in the Secretary of State's speech, he invited me to try to catch the eye of the occupant of the Chair in letting him know to what I was referring. I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman is now unable to be in the Chamber. I am sure, however, that the information will be conveyed to him.

I tell the House again that there is no fraud strategy in Northern Ireland. Evidence was taken last week in Northern Ireland, and we were told that there was no strategy, even though one has been introduced in Great Britain, which in many areas seems to be working well.

Perhaps some hon. Members are not aware that, in Northern Ireland, local authorities do not have anything to do with social security. Similarly, they have nothing to

[Mr. Clifford Forsythe]

do with housing benefit and housing. Those matters are handled by the Social Security Agency and the Housing Executive.

In those circumstances, there is surely an excellent opportunity to introduce one housing organisation or one social security agency. I am speaking of a small area of the United Kingdom in which there are about 1.5 million people. A new strategy could have been brought into place, where it would have worked better than elsewhere.

Unfortunately, my colleagues and I have gained the impression that it appears to be assumed that everything is all right in dealing with fraud in Northern Ireland, even though no measurement is available. The assumption was that, because safeguards were in place, it automatically followed that no fraud was taking place. I will mention some of the frauds that are taking place in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, we have—I do not know whether they are called this in the rest of the United Kingdom—what are known as Giro drops: houses that people claiming benefit use as an address and where their benefit cheque is sent, even though they do not live there. The Giro drops through the letter box—that is why it is called a Giro drop. No matter how we check on housing benefit or any other sort of fraud, we would have to call at all the houses, discover where the people lived, and visit them. I am pleased that there will be more visitors at least in Great Britain. I am sure that the Minister will pass on my comments, so that such visitors will be introduced in Northern Ireland as well.

While in the building construction industry, I worked on building sites with plumbers and heating engineers. Even in those days, on certain days of the week, people "doing the double" disappeared from the site and returned after an appreciable period. They had signed on and returned to work—known by most people as doing the double. As is well known, that still goes on in parts of Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

We have a border, boundary, frontier—I leave it to hon. Members to decide what to call it—between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but the social security system in the Republic is different from the one in the UK. It is not unknown for people living in the Republic of Ireland to claim benefit not only in the Republic, but in Northern Ireland, and vice versa.

There is another example of a fraud strategy being required in Northern Ireland. I know—and the Select Committee on Social Security took evidence on this—that there is contact and close co-operation between the Department in Northern Ireland and the Department in Dublin on that fraud, but how do we know what the position is if there is no strategy and we cannot obtain any figures?

There is another serious example involving benefit fraud in Northern Ireland. Some people claiming benefit are undertaking other activities—and I do not mean that they are working. The great problem in dealing with those claimants is simple: they are handled, under their normal duties, by junior staff, who are placed in a difficult position. Other senior officials do not handle those claimants.

It is well known, and has been mentioned in various places in Northern Ireland, that those things are happening. That is another example of fraud. All the things that I have mentioned have been and are going on, and, as has been admitted, we do not have a fraud strategy in Northern Ireland comparable with that in the rest of the UK.

Another example of fraud applies to the rest of the UK as well: in certain circumstances, employers do not pay national insurance contributions for employees. As a result, if those employees are made redundant or lose their jobs, they cannot claim benefit, because the required national insurance contributions have not been paid.

The local government auditor's 1994 report recommended that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive should have a dedicated fraud team. I was interested to hear that some of today's suggestions head in that direction. I do not wish to place the Minister in the difficult position that he seemed to be placed in by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), even though I know that, as Chairman of the Select Committee—of which I am honoured to be a member—he did not mean anything personal about it.

The Minister may not have the advisers here that he may require to answer some of my points. I do not wish to let him off the hook, but I will understand if, in his winding-up speech, he cannot answer some of my queries, and I receive replies later.

However, much of the Select Committee's evidence shows that, in bringing people who have committed fraud before the courts, the Theft Act 1968 is used rather than social security legislation. The local government auditor's report commented that, under social security legislation, someone claiming benefit fraudulently could be sentenced to three months in prison. It seems strange that that Act, which involves a cumbersome operation, is often used. Surely social security legislation should be considered and implemented in appropriate cases.

In Northern Ireland, we have no measurement of fraud, so we cannot ask how much fraud there is, how it can be or has been measured, or how it will be stopped, even though the Minister and Secretary of State may say, "These are the measures that should be used to stop benefit fraud." I hope that the people in charge of these matters in Northern Ireland will note what has been said, and that something will be done.

On national insurance numbers, along with other colleagues, I was delighted to be in Newcastle. We had an excellent, well-prepared presentation—I congratulate the Minister on that. Sufficient officials were there to answer all our many questions. The majority of their answers were good and we accepted them, as we always do, but I was concerned about a couple.

I do not think that I received the answer—I may have misunderstood what was said—on piggy-backing, where someone uses another person's national insurance number. A person could be employed and paying national insurance contributions, although, at the same time, someone using his or her national insurance number is drawing benefit. That concerned the whole Committee. I should add that it is a very happy Committee: we work very well together. I hope that I am doing no one any harm by speaking in this way. Incidentally, the Committee also has an excellent Chairman.

I understood the Minister's observation that, when someone dies, the person left behind may need to use the national insurance number for some reason, and that it should therefore remain in existence. What I cannot understand is why the national insurance number of a

single person with no relatives should remain on the record. I am not nit-picking, but I feel that such numbers could be removed from the system. The word "clutter" should not be used in this context, but the Minister will know what I am saying. Perhaps at least some of the numbers could be removed.

I welcome all proposals to prevent fraud, and to ensure that those who should receive money receive it. I feel, however, that Northern Ireland should have a proper strategy to deal with fraud, and that those concerned should be adequately trained—even members of staff. Perhaps there should be joint initiatives involving the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Social Security Agency, and, indeed, the Department of Health and Social Services, as it still is in Northern Ireland. Secondments would provide members of those bodies with experience. At least, at this stage, Northern Ireland should be brought into line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

7.32 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): In his opening speech, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the sums involved. Perhaps because debates such as this take on a timeless quality over the years, I sometimes feel that the sums that we discuss are so vast that the public—who have hurried off to HMSO in the morning to buy their copies of *Hansard*—probably decide that they are meaningless.

The figures involved in social security debates are, in fact, so large that even those who feel that they are being beaten into the ground with percentages may begin to realise just how large they are. It is not simply a case of the social security budget being larger than the education or defence budgets: it is well over twice the size of the two combined.

There are various ways of expressing the £90 billion that is spent on social security. One way is this: it is equivalent to £15 in respect of every person for every working day. Obviously, when disbursing such a huge amount on behalf of the taxpayer, the state should pay attention to where it goes.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)—and, I think, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—implied that the Government had discovered the situation suddenly, rather late in the day. Apparently they have a right-wing agenda, according to some anonymous person—perhaps not the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, but some other Labour Member. This, it seems, is part of some dark right-wing agenda that the Government have dreamed up in the last few hours, or at best, the last few months.

I do not consider that entirely fair. I have been in the House since 1983, and I do not think that a month, or even a week, has gone by without some reference—perhaps in a parliamentary question, in an exchange at Prime Minister's Question Time or in a well-attended debate such as this—to the fact that the wicked old Tory Government are out there grinding the faces of the poor. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for the confirmation; I knew that I had heard it before.

The Government have been out there trying to tighten up on fraud, crack down, and make the criminal law more effective. The idea that what is currently happening is spanking new is without foundation. There may, however, be a reason for its superficial credibility. The suppression of fraud is not an end in itself; it is part and parcel of the attempt to ensure that benefits go to the people for whom they are intended. We can argue, as did the hon. Member for Birkenhead, whether benefits should be means-tested more or less, but I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House would agree that the money should go to those to whom Parliament wants it to go.

When the Government came to power in 1979, the benefits system was, in a sense, wide open. In those days, the test governing whether a person received what is now known as income support was whether that person was available for work. The concept of availability for work seemed all right to begin with, but ultimately came to be seen as a complete sham. It was simply a case of "I am at home; if the telephone rings and someone wants to offer me a job, I might entertain the idea." Many people who were making no real effort were freeloading on the system. In a sense, that was a fraud on the taxpayer: money was going to people to whom it was clearly not intended to go.

To counter that, the Government introduced the concept of "actively seeking work". As soon as the two tests were applied together, the opportunity for fraud on the taxpayer in the literal sense was removed: benefits were going to those to whom they should be going. Those were the days of peace convoys cruising around the country, and social security officers taking their mobile paying-out clinics to peace convoy meetings. All that nonsense—which went on in my constituency—was dealt with by the introduction of more stringent tests.

The agenda of the 1980s was to ensure that the law was properly defined, so that only those who went out of the benefit should receive them. That was integral to the debate about fraud: until that side had been got right, there was not much point in trying to come up with "technical" mechanisms to deal with the problem. The claim that we have been doing nothing about it since 1979 is without basis: the facts do not bear it out for a moment.

It was particularly interesting for anyone with a penchant for blood sports to observe the state that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury got into when taking Conservative interventions. I must tell the hon. Gentleman—hoping, perhaps, to add to his discomfort—that I am a great admirer of his: he is a man of considerable intellectual rigour and considerable personal courage. In some ways, I pitied him for having the brief that he had been given. Faced with such a wicket, some of his hon. Friends would have resorted to a venomous opacity, kept their heads down, read out the speech without understanding it, and reached the end of it in that way. But the hon. Gentleman is not like that: when asked some pertinent questions to which he knew that there were no answers, being the honest man he is, he did not answer them.

Two questions did need answering, however. First, what has the hon. Gentleman's party done since 1979 to support the Government's attempts to crack down on benefit fraud? There is no answer to that—or, rather there is: Labour has done absolutely nothing. The beefing up of the "availability for work" test with an "actively seeking work" test was opposed by the party at the time.

Labour also opposed the attempts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)—attempts that were largely, if not entirely, successful—to ensure that the availability of benefits was based on net rather than gross income, the idea being that people should always be better off in work than out of work. Such steps were part and parcel of fraud prevention.

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

Let me help the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, and repeat the answer to the question that he did not wish to answer: the Labour party has done absolutely nothing.

The hon. Gentleman next blamed means testing. That really is pushing it. When he was asked what benefits would be means-tested under a Labour Government, answer came there none. I have genuinely never understood why on earth the Opposition are against the concept of means testing properly carried out.

No one is saying that one should go back to the situation that obtained in the 1920s and 1930s, when an audit of the most brutal and undignified kind was done on a person claiming state benefit. We are saying that, if we are going to take money from people, we should at least make sure that it goes to those for whom it is intended.

Of course, some people say that means testing is undignified, and if we jack up the taxes on the rich, we shall not have to go through that unhappy process. That might sound like a good idea, but I understand that it has been repressed on the Opposition Benches today. I am only sorry that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is no longer here, because I had hoped that he would add that suggestion to the debate.

The fact is that we can think of income tax as a means-tested benefit. As I said in an exchange with the hon. Member for Birkenhead, the overwhelming proportion of taxes is provided not by the rich—there are not enough of them to soak—but by basic rate taxpayers. About 87 or 88 per cent. of the total tax take in this country is provided by ordinary working people, those who pay basic rate tax and never reach the higher rate. If they are means-tested and being asked how much they earn so that we can tax their income and spend it elsewhere, I can see nothing wrong in means-testing the recipients of that money, providing that process is carried out decently and carefully, and in a dignified manner.

I put that matter to the hon. Member for Birkenhead, whom I admire enormously. Like the hon. Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe), I have served on the Select Committee on Social Security. This phrase is often used too casually, but it was a privilege to serve under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Birkenhead, who has an extraordinary grip of the subject.

Frankly, a well-prepared and highly competent Secretary of State should have nothing to fear from an Opposition Back Bencher—it is an unequal contest, whichever party is in government. It says a great deal for the hon. Member for Birkenhead that, over the years, I have seen him press highly skilled and highly competent Secretaries of State, like my right hon. Friend the current Secretary of State for Social Security.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead is really a remarkable performer. However, when I pressed him on what he had against means testing, he entered very dangerous territory. It says much for him that he was prepared to enter that territory. Some pretty hard choices follow if one says that fraud is going to occur because the level of benefit is such that, if one wage earner in a household loses that wage, the family will be better off on benefit.

What are we doing for the dignity and credibility of a potential average wage earner if we so subvert what his own talents can achieve and earn for him that we pay him so much for not working? What does that do for his self-esteem? Nothing that we do tonight will solve that problem, but we have created a situation in which the whole structure of benefits completely undermines the working poor. There is far larger argument about the effects of this on the family, and on young males in society. A great deal of good material has been produced by sociologists here and on the other side of the Atlantic.

The idea that there is something wrong with means-tested benefit has some curious implications for the debate on fraud. At some stage, we shall have to consider why it is thought to be a good idea that the basic rate taxpayer should contribute to the child benefit that I, as a higher rate taxpayer, receive. I am grateful for it—it is useful and pays for a holiday every now and again—but I sometimes find it difficult to look into the face of the working poor and say to myself that I am part of a system that produces such an anomaly. At some stage, we shall have to get to grips with it.

Mr. Leigh: I do not agree with my hon. Friend at all. He has paid into the system all his life. It is supposed, in some sense at least, to be a contributory system, so, if he has paid in, why should he not get something back? After all, if he has children, expenses are accrued. I see no reason why he should be cheated out of the money.

Mr. Nicholls: There are three reasons why I pay into the system. First, I have no choice, and I should get done if I did not. Secondly, bearing in mind that I have an earning potential considerably greater than the average, I need to pay into a common tax pool to help look after those people who cannot look after themselves. Thirdly, if I ever fall on hard times, I would expect to be able to say that, having paid in during my good years, I now want to draw something out in my bad years. However, it is inefficient in the meantime to give me a non-means-tested benefit on the off-chance that it might be useful to me.

My hon. Friend knows as well as I that some people's livelihood and the food on the table that very day depends on their getting child benefit, whereas for others child benefit is simply drawn out once a year to be spent on a holiday. That is not an efficient way in which to run our benefit system.

Mr. Chris Smith *rose—*

Mr. Nicholls: Yes, I shall give way, because I have not forgotten the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Smith: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with considerable care and interest. Would he apply the principle that he has just applied to child benefit to the old age pension, which takes far and away the largest slice of the Department's expenditure but which is based precisely on the contributory principle, and is paid whether or not one is in need of it?

Mr. Nicholls: No. I do not think that the analogy is fair, for a number of reasons, the principal one being that very few people are entirely dependent on a retirement pension. Their income is topped up in a variety of ways, if necessary, by income support. Increasingly, I am pleased to say, under this Government it will also be topped up by the provision made by people during their lifetime. For many people, although not the majority, the

retirement pension will not be a particularly significant part of their maintenance. I accept that the hon. Gentleman is making a useful point, but it is by no means a direct analogy.

I had not forgotten entirely what the hon. Gentleman said earlier. It says something about his party's attitude to the problem that he got into real difficulties when mention was made of the letter that he wrote to the shadow Chief Secretary. A section of it is worth reading out again in view of what he said. The letter says:

"The advice I am getting, which is necessarily incomplete, nevertheless suggests that savings in running costs of this magnitude are perfectly feasible, given the opportunities for efficiency gains and the scale of investment already undertaken".

It says something about what the Government have done that, in private correspondence at least, the hon. Gentleman refers to "investment already undertaken". I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman—the last thing anyone wants is to have his private correspondence read out on the Floor of the House, although one does it without malice but with a great deal of glee.

The hon. Gentleman then said that we had got it all wrong and should look up the word "feasible" in the dictionary, because it means only possible, not desirable. In other words, the hon. Gentleman is saying that he accepted that it was possible to make savings for the taxpayer, but not desirable.

Mr. Smith: I intervene wearily, because the hon. Gentleman is making precisely the same point that one of his colleagues made. He is also making the same mistake. I did not write the letter to which he refers; it was written by the shadow Chief Secretary to me. If he read the whole letter, he would have seen that my hon. Friend said clearly:

"There must be doubts about the wisdom of trying to achieve so much in so short a time."

My hon. Friend was not endorsing the suggestions or saying that they were desirable, but that they were active suggestions in the Department and that he had doubts about whether they were achievable.

Mr. Nicholls: So he was not saying that they were completely unacceptable, wrong, morally outrageous and risible, and should be rejected out of hand and scorned, but that there might be doubts about them. Fine—if the hon. Gentleman wants to put that gloss on matters, I am happy that he should do so.

I suspect that the explanation goes back to the underlying feeling that, for all that we see a new model Labour party, old ideas die hard. That was summed up very well by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) who is reported in the *Daily Mirror*—and, therefore, I assume, not misquoted—as criticising the use of new technology against fraudsters. He said:

"Benefit claimants may soon have to pass a palm print screening test to collect their State cash. It's one option now being considered in a fraud crackdown review, Social Security Peter Lilley revealed today. But Labour spokesman Donald Dewar denounced Government palm or finger printing, warning it would make pensioners claiming income support think that they are second class citizens".

He must be joking. I assume pretty much the same sort of people go to his surgery as come to mine. I find that people are outraged by the idea that some claimants are ripping off the system. The people who take the most exception to fraud are not wealthy toffs and Members of Parliament on their inflated salaries: they are the working poor who get up early on a wet morning to do a boring, mundane job to support themselves, and who find that two doors down somebody is ripping off the system.

If people, be they claimants or pensioners, were told that the vast majority of claimants were honest, desperately sad about being out of work and anxious to get back to work, but that others were ripping off the system, and were asked whether they would co-operate in introducing a new-style pass using photographs, magnetic strips, DNA testing or whatever to ensure that they received the maximum amount of benefit and the rascals were stopped, an overwhelming majority—especially of those who complain to me about the benefits system—would reckon that was pretty much okay. That is the fault line running through Labour Members' thought. They seem to assume that, if one is claiming benefits, all inquiry must stop about whether one is entitled to those benefits.

Such a dichotomy is evident in relation to not only benefit fraud but asylum seekers. As far as the Labour party is concerned, anybody who says he is an asylum seeker is an asylum seeker. The fact that 90 per cent. of the claimants turn out to be bogus and fraudulent does not matter two hoots—it must not be tidied up. If somebody says he is a refugee, he is a refugee. It is an extraordinary flight from reality, and ultimately intellectually dishonest.

Until relatively recently, if a claimant had their mortgage paid by the Benefits Agency, they were paid an amount to hand over to the building society. Inevitably, a few people ripped off that system, and kept the money for themselves. That vice had to be stopped, because ultimately such people's houses would be repossessed, they would be made homeless, they would then present themselves to the local authority as having been made compulsorily homeless, and they would ask to be rehoused. That is not a sensible use of taxpayers' money.

I discovered two constituency cases relevant to that process. One was of a man who was severely disabled by polio in his youth, and, as a result of a number of extremely unpleasant and painful operations, was able to work. He worked his way up from a labourer to a management post, finally found that his health was breaking down, and had to give up work. To ensure that he was putting something into society, he took part in a number of charitable activities, and contributed a great deal.

One day he found that he was no longer—as he would see it subjectively—capable of looking after his own finances, and that his mortgage had to be paid for him. He eventually came to see me, because the Benefits Agency was paying in arrears, not in advance, and, given his contract with the building society and through absolutely no fault of his own, he suddenly had a notional amount of one month's arrears throughout the year, which resulted in typical correspondence with the building society.

The other case was of a person who had run a small independent school, fell on hard times, became a claimant, always discharged his mortgage, never misapplied the funds he received, and in due course found that he too was not allowed to pay his mortgage any longer. He got letters from the building society threatening repossession, because some arrears had accrued.

[Mr. Nicholls]

It is not simply a question of people being honest. If one finds that one has to live in straitened circumstances—extremely straitened circumstances in the cases to which I have referred—and one is able to do so competently and honestly, it ought to be possible in the system to distinguish between such people and the feckless and rascals.

Both my constituents asked why it was not possible to allow them to continue to discharge their liabilities unless and until there was some default. Both said that, as a result of an increased awareness of and campaign against fraudsters, of which they both entirely approved, almost unknowingly their dignity had been infringed—yet they had never let the system down.

I am not asking my hon. Friend the Minister to reply on that point in the debate. I have already written to him about both the people to whom I have referred. It is, however, relevant to the debate to say that we must always ensure that, in cracking down on the few who are ripping off the system, we never allow those who are behaving honestly to feel that the system is in some way directed against them.

There is no doubt that some people think that those living on benefits must be defrauding the system. Being a Member of Parliament brings one into contact with a cross-section of society whom we simply would not otherwise meet. That, apart from anything else, has convinced me of how honest the overwhelming majority of people are. My experience is that those who have fallen unexpectedly on hard times feel embarrassed and suspect that they are being tarred with a brush that applies to very few.

Cracking down on fraud is therefore not simply about being efficient and ensuring that taxpayers' money is being properly applied: it is the discharge of a duty to those who have no choice but to be on benefits; to ensure that they can still hold their heads up in society. The assumption is that the system should be efficient and rigorous enough to ensure that people receiving benefits are right in doing so. I think that many people who unexpectedly find themselves on hard times would associate themselves with that argument if they heard me say it.

7.56 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): As I seem to be the last line of defence on the Opposition Benches, I shall try to live up to the responsibility. I feel as though I am intruding on a meeting of a club of past and present members of the Social Security Select Committee, former Ministers and spokespersons. Despite the trepidation that I feel in front of all those experts, I shall do my best to acquit myself in presenting the Labour party's point of view.

Conservative Members try to impute a mindset to Labour Members. The Secretary of State tried to do it again in this debate with his soundbite that Labour is soft on fraud. I cannot put myself into a frame of mind to accept that charge or see any justification for it. As some hon. Members have said, people from my type of background most bitterly resent fraud. I do not therefore accept that Labour is soft on fraud. Nor do I accept Conservative Members' mindset that we are that way inclined.

I join my hon. Friends on the Front Bench in welcoming this opportunity to discuss the Government's first systematic attempt in 17 years to combat fraud. Points have been made about certain initiatives, but I have not heard any Conservative Member offer an exposition of the systematic attempt to sort out fraud, ascertain its nature and define the extent of the problem. We have always been opposed to social security fraud in all its forms because we believe that any Government have a duty to strike at that abuse wherever it is found.

The much-quoted, happy Select Committee on Social Security said:

"anti-fraud activities are an integral part of ensuring that social security spending goes to those who need it most".

I very strongly agree with that. As many hon. Members have said, every pound wasted on fraud is a pound less going to someone who genuinely needs it and is legally entitled to it. I have absolutely no time for people who defraud the public purse. In committing that crime, they ensure that a man, woman or child who could do with that money and support does not get it.

Starting with the Secretary of State, every Tory Member failed to mention the two sides of the coin, and I shall wait to see whether the Tories' last line of defence also fails to mention it. As well as their duty to stamp out fraud, there is a duty on the Government to ensure that all those who are legally entitled to benefits claim them: not one Tory Member has mentioned that.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is right that the take-up of benefits has not been mentioned, but there is a good reason for that—the debate is not about the take-up of benefits. He is right that it is an important subject, but there have been some impressive campaigns recently—I say impressive because of their effect on the take-up of various benefits—on the subject. He is right that that effort should continue, but he should not criticise hon. Members for not mentioning something that is not the subject of the debate.

Mr. McAvoy: The hon. Gentleman's intervention is not valid. He is trying to close debate and prevent hon. Members from mentioning the overall situation. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) mentioned the two sides of the coin, and it is reasonable to expect at least some response from Tory Members to a point made by a Labour Front Bencher.

Perhaps the real reason why no Tory has mentioned the matter is that, by the Government's own estimates, £2 billion of social security benefits are not being claimed by those legally entitled to them. If the Government are as keen as Tory Members make out, why are they planning to abolish all the services that would encourage the take-up of that £2 billion of unclaimed benefits? There is a hidden agenda. Opposition Members—*[Interruption.]* That was a Freudian slip—I am looking ahead to the next few months. Tory Members have not mentioned the other side of the coin.

No firm estimate of the extent of social security fraud has been made, although claims have been made about possible savings from anti-fraud measures. I repeat that no Opposition Member wants to side with criminals, which is what benefit fraudsters are. Britain was the pioneer of social security after the war, and it is as necessary now as it was then. For the system to function effectively, however, it must be protected from corruption and abuse.

One of the great and sometimes endearing features of my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—to whom tribute has been paid by hon. Members on both sides of the House—is that he thinks and says the unthinkable. That is to his credit, but we have not seen much of that attitude from Tories. A point of view expressed by my hon. Friend—a point that is appearing more and more in the policies of the shadow Chancellor, my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—is that the welfare state was never intended to become a permanent way of life for its users. It was intended for emergency periods in people's lives and a safety net to help those who had fallen on hard times. It was intended to provide a guaranteed minimum standard of living for people in need until they were able to support themselves. The message that receiving social security is a right and not an act of charity has been put across successfully.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) referred to the means testing system used in the 1920s and 1930s. My mother, father and grandparents were subjected to that system at that time and, although it may be dismissed lightly now, we should not forget such things. I remember hearing my parents' and grandparents' experiences of that system, and Tory Members should never forget that Opposition Members—the descendants of people who were means-tested—know how that system operated. Sometimes Tory Members seem keen to implement such a system again, although I exempt the hon. Member for Teignbridge from that.

If we are to have a cohesive society, social security must play a part, but it must be conveyed more and more that the right to social security is accompanied by a responsibility. The system cannot hope to function properly if it is used irresponsibly, and those who misuse it are robbing those in genuine need. Why have the Government not responded to the problem sooner? The House heard a detailed debate between my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and Tory Members on the effect of means-testing benefits, and we need a separate debate on that subject.

As the percentage of means-tested benefits rises, the Government will have to accept that there will be suspicion among Opposition Members and throughout the country about their motives. If they want to extend means testing to different types of benefit and to maintain a socially cohesive society, there will have to be consultation between the Government and the Opposition. If there is a genuine desire for progress, there should be a consensus on the type of benefits to be means tested. If the Government merely impose the scheme, they will arouse suspicion. If they propose more intensive means testing, I will oppose it unless they give specific and justified reasons for doing so.

We must investigate cases of genuine need, although over-extending interrogation—as that is what investigation can amount to—might reintroduce the stigma that characterised means testing in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, the system is ineffective and inefficient as it encourages false claims.

The Secretary of State lauded the concept of home visits, but what he did not say—perhaps the Minister will do so—was that even if the number of annual home visits is increased by 1 million, it will still make a total of only 1.5 million visits, as opposed to 6.5 million in the year when the Tories came to power. If home visits are so good, why have they been reduced so drastically by the Government?

The Secretary of State's idea of hit-squads targeting certain areas and advertising that the DSS will be conducting a thorough investigation will, I hope, not mean harassment, and that proposal must be scrutinised and debated. I can think of several areas in my constituency that would appear to fit the Government's criteria for such a hit-squad. I shall consider the matter and conduct some research into it. I hope to hear some more information from the Minister on it. The idea strikes fear in my heart because it immediately sections off parts of our community and makes them targets. It also displays a mindset that particular areas and particular income groups will be targeted in that manner. It seems to be accepted by the Government that certain geographical areas in this country, by definition, contain people on social security benefit and consequently should be targeted.

Mr. Heald: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that there was no intention of doing what the hon. Gentleman suggests. The spotlight campaigns will be focused on different areas; it has not been suggested that any specific type of area should be chosen. The evidence obtained through the benefit reviews shows that benefit fraud is widespread in different areas.

Mr. McAvoy: That intervention hints at the sort of debate that I should like to see before there is general acceptance of the policy. I accept that the Minister is not trying to mislead, but how will the Department pick an area? Will the choice be based on geography or the number of claimants? The system that will need to be created to manage the targeting smacks of big brother, Stalinism and fascism—both sides of the spectrum.

I am not a social engineer or a great sociologist, but I have experience of my community and of life. If parts of a community are targeted—which clearly will happen—what effect will that have on social cohesiveness? I do not want to start sounding like a social worker or a community worker, but what does that do to the self-esteem of individuals in the community and the community itself? The Department will immediately divide and rule, and turn areas and people into outcasts. I should like to hear more from the Government about exactly how they will choose and manage the areas that are to be targeted. It is a horrible, horrifying idea that will lead us into trouble in future.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) for raising the subject of landlord fraud. We all know that local councils, especially in Scotland, face dreadful problems in terms of Government support for their reorganisation. I have read about what has happened in Haringey and heard, from the hon. Member for Broxbourne, about what can happen when a council investigates its own area and digs deep into the fraud carried out by landlords. If each council had a grant support settlement that enabled it to develop that aspect of its work, surely that would be cost-effective, bring in money and sort out fraud. We have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House—it does not seem to be a matter of contention—that landlord fraud is extensive and should be investigated. That would be a cost-effective way of tackling fraud.

[Mr. McAvoy]

I agree with some of the points that have been made about the dependency culture; it is a fact of life that such a culture can build up. It would be helpful if we could break it. We have also discussed means testing and the overall picture of society. Surely the only way to tackle such problems is to consider the wider picture. Labour party policies such as the statutory minimum wage, job creation, nursery provision and incentives to work would reduce the burden on the social security budget. We should take a two-pronged approach—we should not just attack fraud, but remove poverty and unemployment, which make people claim benefits. Surely there should be a two-way attack. Instead of paying vast sums of money from the social security budget, we should get people into work and create taxpayers who contribute to the country and who have disposable incomes. That is how the system was originally intended to operate and it is the only way in which it can work.

The Secretary of State charged the Labour party with being soft on fraud. I contrast that charge with the effective, constructive, hard-headed and realistic policy proposed by the shadow Chancellor in an attempt to give young people incentives to get into work, while linking that policy to benefits. I know that such a concept is not entirely welcomed by all hon. Members, but linking benefits with a back-to-work scheme for youngsters reflects the reality that, for 17 years, our young people have not had much hope of obtaining employment, which has inculcated in them a sense of dependency. I accept that, in some areas, claiming benefit is a way of life, but that way of life must be broken; the scheme of my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor would go some way towards doing so.

I am sometimes a cynical and suspicious person, and it strikes me as curious that the Government have brought up the subject now in the run-up to the general election, especially when not one Conservative Member mentioned the other side of the coin—encouraging people to claim benefits to which they are legally entitled. The fact that the Conservatives have raised the subject now shows that they are making a desperate attempt to score cheap political points by making scapegoats of those in need. There is nothing more unedifying than the sight of the Conservative party losing its grip on power, its fingernails scraping down the wall as it becomes more and more desperate. Today's debate is part of that desperation.

The Government always place great faith in concepts such as efficiency. If they are genuinely concerned about benefits that are paid out inappropriately, they should tackle the overpayments made by their civil servants at the DSS. According to the Public Accounts Committee's report for 1993-94, those civil servants made overpayments of £500 million, affecting 642,000 claimants. The Government might say that the payments were not made on purpose, but they are ministerially responsible for them and, as far as I can make out, they have done nothing about them. They have merely come forward with cheap headlines that attack poor people, irrespective of the merits or honesty of their case. They have done so purely and simply to get headlines because they know that most of those people will not vote for them. Those are the actions of a cynical Conservative Government.

The Treasury's proposed 25 per cent. cut in DSS running costs may be economical, but it should not be confused with efficiency. Earlier, some hon. Members read from a leaked letter—Conservative Members kept making mistakes about who had sent which letter to whom. I shall finish with a quote from the letter sent from the Secretary of State to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I accept that it is annoying when letters are leaked. It stated:

"Your proposed settlement on running costs fills me with despair".

The Secretary of State has not denied that statement so, by definition, the letter and his comment are accurate.

I do not think that anyone in the House would question the Secretary of State's grasp and knowledge of the subject, so if he makes such a statement it shows that the exchange of letters between my hon. Friends the Members for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) and for Islington, South and Finsbury were not an endorsement of, or support for, something that the Secretary of State said filled him with despair.

8.19 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): From listening to the debate, I believe that there is no doubt that the Opposition have moved on since the last time we debated the subject, in 1993. The trouble with such a subject—and, I suspect, one of the reasons why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was keen to have this debate—is that the more we hear from Labour Back Benchers, the less they seem to have moved on. Old Labour comes shining through. The party has not changed much.

From what the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said—and from the rather partial defence of his own record by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley)—I take it that the hon. Gentleman repudiates what the hon. Member for Withington said in the 1993 debate. It is all very well to quote the odd bit saying that Labour is opposed to social security fraud but then spend the rest of the speech attacking any attack on social security fraud.

I have had the dubious pleasure of reading the two speeches of the hon. Member for Withington in that debate, and very boring they were, too. Nobody could read them, or could have been present at the debate, and come away without the impression that the hon. Gentleman did not believe that this was a serious issue worthy of investigation. It is pretty fatuous, in the language of a true plutocrat, to say,

"In terms of overall expenditure on benefits, £1 billion is barely more than 1 per cent.—a tiny figure."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 1255.]

It may be a tiny figure to him but it is not to me, to my constituents or to the Government.

I waited with bated breath for the eight policy announcements that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury promised us.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): The hon. Gentleman was asleep.

Mr. Hughes: It was boring, but I was not asleep. I wrote the policy announcements down for greater

accuracy. I separate the first, scrapping self-assessment, from the other seven. It is populist and sounds good. The Government's idea is not that radical because most private companies have made that step-change. The successful ones have said, "Let's look at our administration. Can we save money? Can we make the savings that people have thought to be impossible before?" and they have succeeded.

The target set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, welcome and sensible though it is, is quite modest when compared with what several companies have done. It is certainly achievable. In Opposition, it is easier to say that it is outrageous, unachievable and will destroy the present system. Scrapping self-assessment had to be No. 1 on their list. It is safe for them to witter on about that without anyone attacking them.

The other seven promises were a lazy man's view of making policy. If that is as far as the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury has got, now that he is halfway through his review of social security policy, it is not impressive stuff. I can tell the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) that, as a member of the Social Security Select Committee, I am a member of the club that he mentioned.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury has simply got a researcher to go through the transcripts of Social Security Committee hearings and glean anything that sounded like a reasonably good idea. He has strung all seven together and called it the Labour party's programme. That is not greatly impressive and does not amount to a policy platform. He is going to have to do a great deal better if he is to carry conviction and fight off the repeated rumours in the press that, were there to be a Labour Government, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) would be Secretary of State.

We accept that the Labour party has moved, but it has not moved far. People will recognise that as time goes on.

Mr. Chris Smith: The hon. Gentleman can do better than this.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman says that I can do better than this. If he does not think much of this speech, I might say that I am merely following his lead.

The Labour party has not been in favour of fighting fraud. That has been shown not only in the speech of the hon. Member for Withington two years ago but in the whole ethos whereby the Labour party argues that to attack fraud in the social security system is, by definition, to attack people who misrepresent their circumstances but who are poor. The Labour party argues that such fraud does not matter and that those people are just trying to get a bit of extra money to keep their families together. Those arguments are understandable.

As the hon. Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe) pointed out, such fraud is often given folksy, acceptable names to make people think that it is not so bad. The hon. Member talked about the double—people who work on building sites and claim social security. That is one of the problems. People think that it is an acceptable crime. I believe that those days are ending. As one or two Opposition Members have said, people are concerned about the issue, whatever their circumstances, background or politics. However, the Labour party has never bothered to have a strategy on that.

There are Labour councils where fraud is endemic. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) talked about the fraud squad in Lambeth council. One is tempted to think that there are two fraud squads in Lambeth council: the majority of people carrying fraud out and the small team trying to stamp it out. One is reminded of the true story of when there was a flood in Lambeth. The mayor, rightly, went around the council estate that had been flooded to talk to the people who had been flooded out of their homes. As he went from house to house, one of his flunkeys had a list of tenants. After a while, it became a farce because they could not find anyone on the list of tenants that coincided with the names of the people who were living in the houses.

There are perhaps quite a few such Labour councils in London. I accept that it is not all councils, but that problem became endemic in central London. There was so much housing fraud that Lambeth had lost control of its housing stock. Despite having trawled the evidence to the Select Committee, Labour Members have not mentioned the evidence that we took from Bernard Crofton, who was treated disgracefully by Hackney council.

Mr. Jenkin: It is a Labour council.

Mr. Hughes: As my hon. Friend points out, it is a Labour council. Labour Members would prefer that people forgot that. Bernard Crofton, who I remember as a housing officer on Greater London council, has shown enormous bravery in battling against the people who wanted to stifle the facts that he was bringing out. In November 1994, *The Guardian* quoted someone in Hackney as saying:

"The basic story is that Hackney has a huge fraud problem. Bernard Crofton wants it dealt with. Others at Hackney do not."

The article continued:

"During the inquiry, employees were found to be illegally letting council flats in "keys for cash schemes", others were fraudulently claiming housing benefit, and there were council properties stuffed with fraudulently obtained mail order goods."

In his evidence to the Select Committee, Bernard Crofton pointed out that it was clearly an organised fraud. When some of the flats were raided, mail order goods were found crated up to be returned to Nigeria. I make that not as a race point but to say that there is a considerable problem. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Withington wants to be silly, that is fine. If he has a serious point, I would be happy to give way.

There is a huge problem, which has been pointed out several times in the press and on television, of specially trained people coming to Britain to try to take advantage of our social security system. Although I shall return to this theme, it is a truism that every time my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State cracks down on the problems of benefit tourists or changes the asylum seekers benefit regulations, the Labour party opposes him every inch of the way. Therefore, it is very difficult to take the Labour party seriously.

The article in *The Guardian* continued:

"His enquiries revealed that employees were being appointed with phoney references, bogus employment histories and false qualifications. He also claims to have found a number of illegal immigrants among council staff".

Hackney council has never admitted that. There are other questions and claims that no one has ever denied—perhaps a Labour Member will deny them tonight. Where

[Mr. Hughes]

do the proceeds of fraud go? There are stories about a political slush fund in Hackney that have never been denied. We have read those stories in the newspapers and they are very convincing. If they are wrong, someone should deny them. No one has denied that the slush fund exists. If it does, where is the money going?

I think that there is a cosy consensus within the Department of Social Security—it is certainly within the Labour party—dating back many years that somehow fraud is not an important issue. Every time a Minister tried to do something about it, people asked whether it was the right time and whether it was really an important issue. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for taking up the important battle against fraud. It is all very well Labour Members banging on about 17 years of Conservative Government—one would think that 1979 was year zero and that nothing happened before then; certainly nothing was done to combat fraud before 1979. I commend my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend for putting a strategy in place.

I shall mention a few of the measures that my right hon. and hon. Friend have introduced. First, as to the organisational structure, the fraud strategy group has been established to co-ordinate anti-fraud work across the DSS and its agencies, with a senior official appointed to develop the strategy. I have argued that that official should be of a higher grade—I am sure that the individual concerned believes that he should; who does not? That person must command great respect across the DSS.

Secondly, dedicated fraud teams have been established at local level, preventing staff from being diverted from fighting fraud to other work. That will inevitably occur if the work builds up. Thirdly, the central computer system, initially covering 24 London boroughs, has been piloted to cross-check multiple housing benefit claims. The Government have closed legal loopholes, such as those that permitted people who entered the United Kingdom on condition that they would not be a burden on public funds to claim income support and housing benefit.

I look forward to the time when the Labour party accepts publicly that that was a responsible and a reasonable move by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We all know that many Labour Members believe privately that it was a reasonable and a responsible measure: I look forward to their having the guts to say so in public.

The Government have prevented benefit tourism and they have stopped the avoidance of national insurance contributions whereby people were paid in bullion and fine wines and through the other scams that went on.

Another part of the battle against fraud concerns investment. Fraudsters have become increasingly sophisticated so, if we are to be successful in the battle against them, the system must be sophisticated also. Girocheques and order books have been redesigned to make them harder to forge and the Government have invested in security training and information technology. Lastly, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his speech, the Government have given incentives to local authorities which administer housing benefit to expose and stop fraudulent claims. That has proved a spur for local authorities to take the problem seriously. On a non-partisan basis, I pay tribute to the work of London boroughs in concert which have sought to save money in that way.

A secure payment strategy is an important part of the Government's approach and I shall mention some aspects of it. We have the world's biggest social security data-checking operation. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) said that data checking was inadequate. However, until recently, powerful computers were not available. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary pointed out by way of intervention, we have the world's first and biggest data-checking operation which highlights fiddles and multiple claims. Of course, much more can be done and I shall return to that point later. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Government are taking the lead on that issue.

Post office staff are being rewarded for catching fraudsters, and benefit claimants in the south-east have their claim books scanned electronically to check whether they are forged or stolen. Five pilot helplines have been set up to make it easier to report benefit fraud, new guidance has been issued to staff to help them to make more rigorous identity checks and a central database is assisting local authorities in identifying fraudulent claims for housing benefit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) referred to the organised fraud in housing benefit, and undoubtedly many people are involved in it. A number of private landlords—I do not know how many—are either conniving in that fraud or actively part of it. That is costing a great deal of money and there must be a crackdown.

However, there is a second type of fraud that is apparently acceptable and quite legal. I believe that it is right to move to financing individuals rather than bricks and mortar—I think that a much more mixed market in rented accommodation is the only way to solve Britain's housing problems. We heard the old canard from the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours)—who was in the Chamber briefly—about council house building.

I remember when blocks were built in Poplar in the late 1970s. Before they were completed, they were being described as "hard to let" blocks. It cannot be any sort of triumph to build blocks that one knows will be hard to let. That prophesy came true and some of the blocks were pulled down. If one accepts that one should subsidise individuals, that inevitably puts great strain on the housing benefit budget. Some of the changes made in the late 1980s and early 1990s have also added to that budget.

Councils, housing associations and private landlords are running what I believe is a scam. They work out the maximum rent that they can get for a flat in a particular area and that is what they charge. They know that almost all the people who will rent the property will not pay for it, as the money will come from the Government. Of course there are checks on rent, but we should treat that problem extremely seriously because I believe that it represents a fraud against the taxpayer.

Large amounts are paid for relatively ordinary flats, some of which are substandard, in the private or the other sectors and we must ask ourselves whether that is a good use of public money. It is important to have a system of checking rent levels. The Government have introduced some legislation in an effort to control those amounts, particularly for those under 25. Do they get any support from the Labour party? Do they heck. Of course not. The Labour party opposes that legislation, because it is popular

to oppose it. Any suggestion of removing money from people is bound to be unpopular so, "We would not do that," sounds like a good line to take approaching an election.

Mr. McAvoy: Can the hon. Gentleman describe the cost-effectiveness of removing benefit from 16 and 17-year-olds?

Mr. Hughes: No. *[Interruption.]* If it had been part of this debate, I would have been briefed on it, but I was not, so I cannot. The hon. Gentleman made an uncharacteristically short speech. I should have thought that he would speak about that. What has gone wrong in that, as I understand it—at least in my local experience—is the guarantee of a training place. I accept that that has not always worked as smoothly as it might, but, characteristically, the Labour party and some community organisations have exaggerated the problems. Presumably, the hon. Gentleman suggests that we shall have the same problem with the restrictions on under-25s. I do not accept that, because we shall merely cut the money paid out to landlords.

I shall discuss two subjects, the first of which is identity cards. It is a pity that the Labour party has opposed identity cards—but then it has opposed everything. First, it opposed the efficiency improvements. We have had some confusing stuff from the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, who has said that the benefit system

"would be pushed to breaking point . . . with fewer people, more mistakes and worse service"—

unless he was misquoted by *The Independent* as well as the *Evening Standard*. In fact, he did not say that he was misquoted but simply claimed not to have written the letter.

Mr. Chris Smith: You can do better than this, Robert.

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, I am happy to give way.

Mr. Smith: Even the hon. Gentleman must understand that there is a difference between writing a letter and receiving a letter. I received a letter; I did not write it.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that that is what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The point I was seeking to make when he failed to give way earlier is that that is what the *Evening Standard* believed, and if that is wrong I am happy to accept that. That was the only question I wanted to ask him. Either he or the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) believes it, and it does not matter, in a sense, which one. *[Interruption.]* I thought the hon. Gentlemen were from one party. If the hon. Gentleman is telling us that there is one policy for the Labour shadow Treasury team and another for the other Labour Front-Bench teams, that is interesting.

It is a pity that the predecessor of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), now the Labour Chief Whip, strongly criticised the investment in the new benefit cards. To create a single identity, it is important to use identity cards. It is important to be able to ask, "Is this a single person?" The hon. Member for Garscadden also criticised biometric checks and the use of new technology. That is a pity because, to create a single identity, it is necessary to use all available technology. In a few years, the banks will use that technology and it will become commonplace to use one of a variety of biometric checks. If the Government are left behind in the debate and we do not use that technology for social security, people will demand to know why.

Secondly, I shall discuss data matching. Some years ago, when I was parliamentary private secretary in the DSS, the tenor of the debate about data matching between parts of the DSS and other Departments was dictated by arguments that it was an abuse of people's individual freedom for the Government to compare those records. It is obvious from the evidence that is being presented to the Social Security Select Committee that those arguments no longer apply—that people understand that it is reasonable to check up on people. The tenor of the questioning from the hon. Member for Rochdale was the opposite. I am pleased to be able to welcome something that the hon. Lady says. There is a first time for everything.

We want many more DSS agencies to become involved in this, such as the Contributions Agency. The one that I want to mention, however, is the Inland Revenue. To discover whether a name or national insurance number—or whatever part of someone's identity is taken in vain—is being used fraudulently, one needs to know whether they are on the Inland Revenue computer and what it says about them. I understand that the Inland Revenue is being the dog in the manger and saying that it is impossible to do that, not for technical reasons but for bureaucratic ones. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to be extremely tough with the Treasury and to ensure that they obtain access to those records so that data can be matched. Most frauds, personal or organised, would be stopped by that.

Every taxpayer, benefit recipient, family, pensioner and child has a stake in this. It is an important issue, which it is right to discuss on the Floor of the House, and I hope that we do so again, because the policies followed by my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend and the success that they are having leave the Labour party standing, without a policy, without strategy and without an explanation that they will be able to give in the next general election campaign. This is a vote winner, because people understand that we should stamp out fraud and that the Government seek to do it.

8.46 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I am pleased to see that the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) is in his place. I recall that he once tried to live for a week on social security benefit in my constituency—and could not manage it.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Clelland: If the hon. Gentleman said that he did manage, it must have been his former hon. Friend, Matthew Parris, who did not manage it. One of them did not. It is a pity that they are not giving us the benefit of their experiences.

I shall speak about the role of local government and the problems that confront it and suggest some of the best ways to tackle social security fraud from the local authorities' angle. I have nine suggestions, which is one

[Mr. Clelland]

more than my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), but I shall probably repeat some of his.

Local authorities agree about the importance of tackling social security fraud. It will be tackled effectively only if there is a proper, effective partnership between local authorities and the Department of Social Security and if local fraud strategies are developed in a stable framework. The Government have proposed a huge increase in fraud savings targets for local authorities—65 per cent. in some cases. That means that DSS subsidy payments to local authorities will fall from £26.7 million in 1995-96 to £13.7 million in 1996-97—a £13 million reduction, equal to a 49 per cent. cut in subsidy payments for fraud detection.

Mr. Heald: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that that would be the position if local authorities did not rise to the challenge of meeting the targets? If they meet the targets, surely what he says is incorrect.

Mr. Clelland: I hope to discuss the problems as local authorities see them. I shall discuss the point that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Local authorities were notified of the changes very late in the day, despite the fact that Ministers were directly advised by local authority associations of the necessary time scale requirements. Local authorities are important. For example, in 1995-96, local authority fraud staff will save an estimated £220 million in public funds. Benefit officers suggest that more fraud is being detected by local authority fraud investigation staff because there are more staff with better back-up. To avoid losing out as a result of the Department of Social Security's new subsidy proposals, it would be necessary for them to take on more staff—the cost of which would have to be met when the subsidy payments were being reduced.

The late notification of the Department's proposals for 1996-97 is inexcusable. Council budgets for the next year are finalised and it will be extremely difficult for cases to be made for extra staff. If a local authority were able to appoint extra staff, the approval, appointment and training processes would mean that it would be mid or late summer before the new staff could be effective. There is an urgent need for the Department to give local authorities stability in fraud savings targets and subsidies so that they can plan their fraud strategies and invest in their fraud investigation offices.

At the beginning of last year, it appeared that that concern had been understood. Department of Social Security letters to individual authorities and a circular dated January 1995, encouraged authorities to plan and to make long-term investment decisions on the basis of a move towards their uncapped target within two years. Many authorities took the Department at its word and made important investment decisions.

The increase in fraud targets for 1996-97 has not only shown that those statements were misleading, but, more fundamentally, it has removed local authorities' confidence in the stability of the new arrangements. Accordingly, many authorities will be reluctant to commit additional resources to fraud as offsetting income from subsidy can no longer be relied on. The case for stability is also supported by the fact that local authorities have responded positively to the existing arrangements. Savings from the anti-fraud scheme have increased from £92 million in 1993-94 to an estimated £220 million in 1995-96. There is, therefore, no argument for increasing targets on the basis of poor local authority performance.

The Department has presented the proposals as providing further incentives, but the impact for all except the top performing authorities is to reduce the amount of subsidy that local authorities could have anticipated if the present subsidy arrangements had continued. Most authorities therefore view the changes as a cynical attempt to reduce the amount of Exchequer subsidy and fear that it is a step back to the pre 1993-94 era, when local authorities incurred the costs of investigation and the Treasury benefited from the savings.

Local authorities believe that the Department, when making the proposals for 1996-97, was not aware that even good performing authorities are likely to suffer significant reductions in subsidy under the present arrangements. Unless radically revised, the proposals for 1996-97 will have a demotivating impact on most authorities. In addition, the methodology for distributing targets is crude and needs to be reviewed to take account of the findings of the benefit review. The current difference between an exceptionally high performing local authority and a good performing local authority may be more illusory than real. For that reason alone, the Department should avoid radical changes to targets and new subsidy arrangements that reward only exceptionally high performers.

There is the strongest possible objection to the transfer of £5 million from next year's provision for administration subsidy to the anti-fraud challenge fund. The initial publicity gave the impression that the initiative was to be supported by new money. I believe that it is short sighted to reduce the administration subsidy when local authorities' budgets are severely constrained. A stretched and under-resourced service is likely to give more scope for fraud than one that is adequately supported. The move demonstrates the half-hearted nature of the Department's commitment to fraud.

The lack of commitment is emphasised by the fact that the amount of challenge funding has decreased since it was first announced. The Department of Social Security's letter of 7 December stated that the amount set aside for challenge funding was £10 million, but DSS officials recently advised that it will now be only £8 million, of which only £3 million will be new money. There are major misgivings about the cost-effectiveness of the proposed challenge fund as it could divert attention from more effective mainstream fraud work. There is a role for the encouragement of good and innovative practice, but it is not considered that a competitive-based bidding system is an appropriate approach—indeed, competition for funds may deter the sharing of information and ideas.

Although the stated purpose of the initiative is to sponsor innovative schemes, innovation receives the lowest weighting in the Department's proposed scoring system, and the most weighting is given to payback. I believe that the more innovative the scheme, the more difficult it would be to predict payback. It is also clear that innovative schemes to prevent fraud are not eligible. Local authority associations have raised with the Department and in evidence to the House of Commons Social Security Committee the need for additional measures to assist prevention and detection—for example,

the use of national insurance numbers as a reference for all benefits, once we have cleared up how many national insurance numbers are in circulation; the power to recover overpayments to landlords direct from subsequent payments; and the requirement that unemployment offices inform local authorities when claimants cease entitlement to unemployment benefit.

If Ministers seriously intend to encourage a more strategic and partnership approach towards tackling fraud, they should consider the adoption of the following measures. First, they should continue to provide an effective incentive to fraud work. The present targets, which results show are eliciting the necessary response from the overwhelming majority of authorities, should be retained. Secondly, if Ministers are committed to changing targets, a more graduated approach should be adopted. It is unreasonable that good performing authorities under the current scheme have to meet unrealistically increased targets merely to stand still in subsidy terms.

Thirdly, so that local authorities can plan their fraud strategies and make sensible investment decisions, a framework for targets and subsidies should be agreed for the next three years. Fourthly, the methodology for distributing targets should be reviewed in the light of the benefit review findings. Fifthly, challenge funding should not be resourced at the expense of other funding and, therefore, the £5 million cut in administration subsidy should be restored. Sixthly, resources for challenge funding would be more effectively spent by injecting the resources into the mainstream anti-fraud incentive scheme, which would partially offset the cost of the more graduated approach to targets.

Seventhly, the Government should introduce a scheme that provides financial incentives for fraud prevention and prosecution. Eighthly, they should give detailed consideration to the associations' suggestion of new measures to assist fraud prevention and detection. Finally, they should make a more realistic contribution to local authorities' mainstream administration costs so as to avoid the incentive scheme distorting administrative priorities. At the very least, they should consider switching all Government support for administration costs from the revenue support grant to specific grant, as recommended by the Audit Commission for Local Authorities.

Earlier in the debate, the Opposition were challenged to offer solutions. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury listed eight points. My hon. Friends have made other proposals and I have outlined some suggestions. We are entitled to a considered response from the Government and to expect that, if they are serious about tackling fraud in a meaningful way, they will respond positively to our proposals.

8.58 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I shall not comment on the speech made by the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland), who was clearly well briefed. I shall make a few points in the short time that is available.

The future of social security is one of the great unsolved policy riddles that both parties now face. It is an extremely serious subject and requires an informed national debate. We have had some fun slinging insults across the Chamber, but the issue is too important for that. We really need a national consensus on how to proceed, as any reforms will take so long to take effect that no Government of one party can be sure that they will finish the job.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the huge cost of social security. My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) reminded us that it costs £90 billion a year—a meaningless figure to most people, but it represents £15 for every working person every day. The issue is made more serious by an aging and more demanding population. Such clichés as "a demographic time bomb" do not adequately describe the problems that a Government of any party will have to face in the next century.

When I speak to young people in colleges and universities, I tell them that, when they retire in 2030 or 2040, the nation will not be able to afford to give them an adequate state pension. We have to be honest with young people and tell them that now.

Fraud plays a vital part in the debate, although it is only part of the issue. Addressing fraud cannot solve the problem, so what should we do? Should we cut benefits? The Government claim to oppose cutting benefits—they have to say that. I am not sure, however, that their glib and obvious answer is an adequate response. As benefits rise, the poverty and unemployment trap deepens. If we run out of money, benefits may have to be cut.

Should we have more means testing? My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge seemed to advocate that, but more means testing deepens the poverty trap and does not provide an answer. Should we help more people out of benefit and into work? Clearly such schemes as the jobseeker's allowance are just a start and we need a full workfare system.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I should point out to him that the main thrust of the debate and the amendment is related to fraud rather than the social security budget. I hope, therefore, that he is making passing reference to it and not making it the subject of his entire speech.

Mr. Clelland: The hon. Gentleman does not have a speech.

Mr. Leigh: I am sorry that I do not have a speech to read out, as the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge did. Had I such a speech, I should have dealt entirely with fraud.

According to the studies conducted by the Department of Social Security, there may be as much as £8 to £9 billion-worth of fraud in the system. That is a staggering amount—enough to pay for a reduction of 4p in income tax. There should be no limit to the moral indignation felt by British people and the determination of all parties represented in the House to deal with it. Apparently, we saved £717 million in 1994-95, but we must do better. I shall deal in a moment with the checklist of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has tried to achieve. Although some progress has been made, we must do a great deal more.

I believe that the only way to deal with fraud is to introduce a comprehensive system of identity cards based on a national computer-based system. The visit by the Social Security Committee to the Contributions Agency

[Mr. Leigh]

last week has been mentioned. I participated in that visit. People were extremely polite. I hope that the Contributions Agency will forgive me if I am rather less polite.

The Contributions Agency employs no fewer than 9,000 civil servants in Newcastle. We were shown one small department where information technology had been introduced. It should have been introduced years ago, throughout the Contributions Agency, but I understand the problems involved. The Department has to support the unemployed, and Newcastle is an area of high unemployment. The Contributions Agency employs 9,000 people and information technology would drive a coach and horses through their employment.

If fraud is to be dealt with more adequately, and if there is to be a proper contributory system, highly sophisticated information technology must run throughout the system. We talk with great pride about the benefit card, but it is not a smart card. Fraud will not be overcome until everybody has a personal identity smart card that could, presumably, be used also as a credit card, cash card and passport. Every time a person claimed a benefit or used a bank, his card would be linked to a central computer. It might be claimed that there is a civil liberty argument against such a card, but I do not believe that the average law-abiding citizen would resent it. The technology is available now.

Unless we have the vision to introduce such a card, fraud will never be tackled adequately. The only way to tackle the problem is to have complete cross-information between the private and public sectors, and at least within the public sector. It was extraordinary to hear witnesses from my right hon. Friend's Department make clear that there was not enough cross-reference between the Inland Revenue, the DSS and Customs and Excise. That visionary policy is one that the Government and the Opposition must promote.

My right hon. Friend's announcements today reflect some progress, but not enough. He said that the Department will double to 600,000 the number of home visits to check new claims for entitlement. The Labour party has a fair point when it says that the cut in home visits in recent years has resulted in more fraud. My right hon. Friend wants to increase cross-checking of information about benefit claims. I reiterate my point about the use of more sophisticated information technology in the Contributions Agency and the Benefits Agency.

My right hon. Friend will introduce from the autumn the benefit system payment card, but I do not think that it goes far enough. He will also initiate a series of month-long local anti-fraud drives in major urban areas. That is an excellent idea, but can we rely on denunciation? Do we want a society based on denunciation of one citizen by another? I have my doubts, but presumably the exercise will not be based entirely on denunciation.

My right hon. Friend wants to launch three initiatives involving local authorities: a unified computer system; a study of how best to prevent fraudulent housing benefit claims entering the system—in which IT would be a powerful weapon; and encouraging local authorities to establish teams to work alongside the Benefits Agency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) mentioned the evidence of Mr. Bernard Crofton, the housing director of Hackney council. The level of fraud and intimidation against that highly diligent local government officer was an appalling indictment of London's local government system. Anybody who is interested in the subject should read Mr. Crofton's evidence to the Select Committee.

My right hon. Friend will also establish the benefit fraud investigation service. All that is good progress, but much more needs to be done. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), in a written question, asked the Secretary of State

"if he will list each authority in England which achieved *(a)* less than 50 per cent. and *(b)* between 50 per cent. and 60 per cent. of its target level of weekly benefit savings resulting from the detection of housing benefit fraud".—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. *1275*.]

The reply revealed that some local authorities—including the Isles of Scilly, South Bedfordshire and Teesdale—achieved nil per cent. of the threshold. Clearly much more progress needs to be made. We are talking about huge figures.

Fraudulent income support claims total £1.4 billion, and 9.7 per cent. of income support cases are fraudulent, while 18.5 per cent. of lone parents are perhaps making fraudulent claims. Perhaps 30 per cent. of the total is accounted for by people working and claiming simultaneously, and for other reasons.

I believe that we are still hunting around the edges of the issue. We have not really gone to the heart of the matter. Although my right hon. Friend should be warmly congratulated on what he achieved and on the measures that he announced to tackle fraud, we must get a grip on the use of information technology.

The point that my right hon. Friend made in his opening speech was important. There is very little fraud in pension claims, which are based on contributions. We will never provide a long-term future for our social security system unless we recreate the original vision of Beveridge: a social security system based on the contributory insurance principle. That is the way to create a responsible and caring society. It will take years to return to that system, and it will be far more difficult for this country than for younger societies such as Chile, Singapore, New Zealand or Australia, where elderly people account for a far smaller proportion of the population.

We have to have the courage—on both sides of the Chamber—to accept that our social security system is slowly and inevitably running into the buffers. We have to do what Chile did. It was the first country to use the pay-as-you-go system. It was the first country to realise that it was going bankrupt. Indeed, it went bankrupt in the early 1980s. It has now moved to an insurance-based system, in which people are required to pay some of their income into private insurance companies or—if the Labour party prefers—to charitable trusts.

Something has to be done. If we have the vision, I believe that we can tackle the problem.

9.11 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): This has generally been a thoughtful debate with interesting speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I was somewhat disappointed with the speech of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), who, unfortunately, has left the Chamber. He claimed that he

had read the entire debate of some three years ago. I wonder whether he read the words of the then Minister who replied, and who, commenting on my speech, said:

"The Opposition spokesman has been equally determined to show that the Labour party is as rigorous about fraud and abuse as it is about ensuring that everyone gets his just deserts."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 1296.]

That clearly sums up our position. It did so then and it does today. I would like to place on record again, so that there is no confusion or selective quoting by the Secretary of State, that the Labour party, yet again, is as committed as the Government to rooting out fraud.

We welcome this opportunity to discuss the Government's first systematic attempt after 17 years in office to discover the nature of fraud and to define the extent of the problem. Labour has always been opposed to social security fraud in all its forms. It is the duty of Government to strike at abuse wherever it is found. We agree whole-heartedly with the comments in the fifth report of the Social Security Select Committee, which were quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), which said that

"anti-fraud activities are an integral part of ensuring that social security spending goes to those who need it most."

That is crucial. Today, the Secretary of State broadly outlined some of the measures that the Government have taken and plan to take to combat fraud. I am pleased that the Government, after 17 years, have decided to do something to ensure that taxpayers' money goes to those who most need it.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: In a moment.

I believe that it is staggering, and I agree with what the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) said about it having taken so long to start to investigate, for example, the ways in which computers and computer development can be used more effectively to combat fraud. The hon. Gentleman said that he was pleased that the Government, after 17 years, had started to tackle fraud. How many proposals did the Labour party make designed to tackle fraud over the same period?

Mr. Bradley: Obviously, a Labour Government have not been in power for 17 years. The Labour party has been in power, however, in local government throughout the country, and initiative after initiative has been taken by local government. If the Government had taken more notice of some of those initiatives they may not have taken so long to introduce their proposals in the recent past.

It is important for the Secretary of State to confirm at the outset the exact savings that will be made as a result of the anti-fraud measures over the next three years. I have repeatedly asked him to do so. I did so, for example, during the uprating debate. The Minister who responded to that debate wrote to answer the many questions that I asked, but, surprisingly, my question on savings was not answered. I have written to the Secretary of State and I have raised the matter during Social Security questions. I have still not had a reply.

Perhaps the Government are finding it difficult to identify the way in which the fraud figures are being compiled. The figures include irregularities—not necessarily proven fraud—and notional savings in cases where investigations have found irregularities but have not led to cash being recouped. Moreover, the figures are arrived at by multiplying recorded fraudulent claims against a factor of 32. That system is based on the belief that if the fraud had not been discovered it would have taken at least 32 weeks before it would have been. Thus it may be that the Government's problem is that many of the figures that they are compiling are notional rather than hard-cash savings. These are the extrapolations at which the Government are arriving in providing estimates to the House.

When the Minister replies, it would be helpful if he could explain whether I have focused on the reasons for delay in replying to my earlier requests. I hope that he will be able tonight to give us precise figures for the year-on-year savings that he expects to make from anti-fraud measures. It would be helpful if we received that information tonight. Exactly what are the target figures that the Government are setting?

I move on to some of the work that is already under way and some of the other measures that the Government are taking to focus on social security spending on behalf of those in greatest need. We want to consider anti-fraud activities in the widest context in an effort to ensure that entitlement to benefit is recognised.

The Government's review of fraud in the social security system has had two main purposes. The first was to establish the degree of claimants' non-compliance with benefit rules. The second was to establish the reasons for fraud within the social security system. We do not argue with either of those purposes. To date, the Government have published the results of the two reviews and have used these to inform decisions on priorities for increased security within the social security system.

The first review, which was published in July 1995, focused on income support and unemployment benefit fraud. The review suggested an annual fraud level of about £1.4 billion. As a result, the Government launched their five-year programme, with the introduction of a number of measures, including the benefit payment card and a review of home visits. I mention those matters only briefly because they have been well rehearsed during the debate.

I press the Minister to give us further details about the way in which the benefit payment card system will work. The "devastating" reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) received that the security card system would be based on the private finance initiative and that it would be for the contractor to determine the terms of reference of the card, was extremely unsatisfactory. When he replies, will the Minister give us precise details of the nature of the card and how the system will work in practice?

We all accept that pensioners have played little part in any fraudulent activities. Many pensioners enjoy the use of a payment book for the receipt of pensions. It is a useful tool for them in recording benefit received and benefits that they are owed. The book is a valuable source of information for them. Will the Government ensure that, with the introduction of any benefit card, pensioners will still have the option to continue to use their own books?

Despite what the Secretary of State said in his speech, the Government have reduced the number of home visits to claimants made by Benefits Agency staff. Department of Social Security and Benefits Agency officials agree that

[Mr. Bradley]

home visits are one of the most effective ways of detecting and deterring fraudulent benefit claims. In a parliamentary answer in January 1995, it was revealed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, that 6.5 million home visits were made in 1979, when the Tories came to power, but that, by 1994-95, the figure had dropped to merely 500,000. The Secretary of State has promised to increase the number of home visits as part of his new anti-fraud initiatives, but by only 1 million. That nowhere near approaches the level that the Government inherited when they took office in 1979.

Home visits have a useful dual purpose. In the past, officials checked not only what fraudulent claims were being made, but that claimants were receiving all the benefits to which they were entitled. Now, however, officers are instructed to check only on fraud. Have the Government any intention of reintroducing the essential and effective dual role that home visit officers had?

At this stage, it is important to note again that the Government's changes in the social security system have led to more open fraudulent abuse. As has been stated again in the debate, that has resulted from the growing increase in the dependency on means-tested benefit. As we know, during their 17 years in office, the Government have presided over a doubling of means testing from 17 per cent. of benefits in 1978-79 to 35 per cent. in 1995-96.

Mr. Lilley: As the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was unable to answer on two occasions, and now that Labour Members have had time to think about this, could the hon. Gentleman answer the question: do Labour Front-Bench spokesmen propose to reduce the extent of means testing should they ever find themselves in power?

Mr. Bradley: When we find ourselves in power, through the welfare-to-work strategy that we will introduce, we sincerely intend to reduce the number of people who are dependent on means-tested benefits. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State chunters away from a sedentary position, but the introduction of jobseeker's allowance, with the move towards means-tested benefit six months earlier, will exacerbate the problem with greater complexity. We hope that the welfare-to-work strategy will mean that people will not rely on such benefits.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: No. I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman.

Will the Minister confirm that there will be no further delay in the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance? There are persistent rumours that the computer systems that are being introduced for that benefit are not on course and that there may be some difficulties in attempting to make a smooth transition to the Government's new benefit.

Despite the people who may deliberately claim benefit fraudulently, it is important always to stress that the vast majority of benefit claimants are—and I use the words of the Secretary of State:

"as honest as the day is long."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 9.]

Three years ago, when we first debated this subject, I referred to a report by the Low Pay Unit entitled "Policing the Workshy", which pointed out that perhaps one of the greatest impediments to seeking work is that people must fill in so many forms and complete so many interview references showing that they are seeking work. Individual abuses often occur because of ignorance or mistakes in filling in all those forms. Social security officers have a duty to give claimants the maximum help to ensure that they claim correctly. More work should be done to simplify claim forms, which are still too complex for many people. Staff training, and staff sensitivity in the handling of claimants, are also essential to ensure that those who fill in the forms do not encounter difficulties.

That leads me to the subject of the Government's plan to reduce the running costs budget by 25 per cent. That would make the system less rather than more fraud-proof. As we have heard, one of the main ways of achieving savings that the Secretary of State is currently considering is self-assessment of eligibility. If that were introduced, the onus would be on claimants to prove their entitlement to benefit: they would be responsible for knowing which documents they should produce to prove their entitlement.

The analogy of applying for a passport has been used. The Passport Agency does not help people to prove their entitlement to passports; it merely approves or rejects their applications. Applying for a state benefit, however, is a vastly more complicated process. A wealth of factors are relevant—for instance, whether claimants have savings, whether they are claiming other benefits and whether other people are living with them.

As we have heard, fraudsters will not find self-assessment a problem, but pensioners, the disabled and many other vulnerable groups may find it much harder to prove their entitlement. It is they who will suffer if the Government's plan is implemented. If the Government were serious about fighting fraud, they would not be cutting running costs in that way. I hope that the Minister will assure us that they will not do so: such action would give the green light to fraudsters throughout the country.

The other side of the coin, which is equally important, is take-up of and entitlement to benefit. When attempting to root out fraud, the Government should apply the same effort and commitment to ensuring that those who are eligible for benefit receive their entitlement. According to a report in *The Guardian* on 1 March this year, the Benefits Agency plans to reduce some of its help for those claiming benefit: for instance, it proposes reductions in telephone advice lines and "benefit buses". If that is true, it is extremely worrying. We should be building up such work rather than cutting it. I hope that the Minister will confirm that such cuts are not envisaged as part of the attempt to reduce running costs by 25 per cent.

Pensioners are an obvious group of people entitled to benefit. As I have said, they are one of the groups least likely to commit fraud, but they are also the least likely group to take up their entitlement to benefit. DSS estimates show that up to a third of pensioners entitled to income support are not receiving it. Between £840 million and £1.2 billion is unclaimed by pensioners in a single year, and about 1 million pensioners—perhaps more—are missing out altogether. I hope that the Government will tell us tonight that they will launch new publicity drives, and support the excellent work of welfare

rights officers in local authorities throughout the country who take up campaigns and help people, efficiently and effectively, to claim the money to which they are entitled.

The Government's second review—the review of the housing benefit and council tax benefit system—suggests that about £730 million is lost through fraud, and a further £110 million through error. As we have been told, in April the Government will launch a four-point plan to combat housing benefit fraud; but, as the Secretary of State said, the £10 million originally allocated to local authorities as "challenge money" has already fallen to £8 million. Local authorities have subsequently discovered that £5 million of that total was previously allocated as part of the Government's subsidy to them for fraud work that was already under way, leaving a new total of merely £3 million for work that is considered to be essential to combat fraud. Will the Minister confirm that that is the case in his winding-up speech?

As I said earlier, and as our amendment makes clear, the Government should have noticed the excellent work that Labour-controlled local authorities have already done in leading the fight against fraud through the work of their housing benefit departments. In the first three quarters of last year, local authority investigations into housing benefit saved the taxpayer £220 million, for a payment by the DSS of only £26.7 million.

We have heard of the good practice in the Labour-controlled local authorities of Haringey and Camden, and of the way in which they have even received a charter mark from the Prime Minister. In the brief time that I have left to speak, may I select another council at random—for example, Manchester. I praise the excellent fraud work that it has undertaken. In the past 18 months, it has employed five staff specifically for that work.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is clearly paying tribute to the measures that we introduced to give sticks and carrots to local authorities to make them do that work, after years in which many—particularly Labour-controlled—local authorities failed to do it. I am delighted that, in the past 18 months, his local authority has responded to our incentives.

Mr. Bradley: What most pleases me is the praise that the Secretary of State has given to Manchester city council for the work that it has undertaken. It has employed five extra staff and, against a target of £2 million in the first year, it has achieved savings of £3 million. Unfortunately, as a result of that success, the Government have increased its target by 50 per cent., to £3 million, and increased the subsidy pay-back to the authority from 20 per cent. to 25 per cent. Surely the Government should be more generous in ensuring that the local authority can keep more of the money that it has so successfully targeted with its fraud measures. I ask the Minister to reconsider the current subsidy arrangements.

We have heard in this debate of the excellent initiatives undertaken by the Labour party, despite the Government's reluctance over the years to spearhead a campaign to combat fraud wherever it appeared. We clearly welcome the Government's belated initiatives.

I commend the eight-point plan announced by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). It is worth briefly reminding the Secretary of State what the Labour party proposes. It proposes to introduce a special fraud unit to cut across local authority boundaries, particularly in London—I was pleased that the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) also welcomed that proposal; to give local authorities the power to identify the real owners of properties; to tighten up on the use of national insurance numbers; to examine the finders keepers conflict between the Benefits Agency and local authorities and how to achieve better co-operation; to introduce proper fraud audits in the Benefits Agency, in the same way in which local authorities are audited; to examine postal redirections to ensure that payments are being made to the people who should receive them; to examine the way in which employment officers and local authorities work together on these initiatives; and, particularly, to examine scrapping moves towards the general access way in which local authorities are operating. My hon. Friend proposed a series of eight important measures that build on the experience of Labour local government and good practice across the country, which the Government have recognised, albeit belatedly. We shall continue to root out fraud and will ensure that people who deserve benefits receive their entitlements.

9.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): We have had a useful and generally constructive debate. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), for Westbury (Mr. Faber), for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) for their contributions, but I must also pay tribute to the Opposition Members for what they brought to the debate.

I regret that some Opposition Members felt obliged to cavil at the Government's achievements in fighting fraud. We acted on benefit fraud long before the Opposition even discovered the issue. When I heard the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) talking about 13 years of inaction and how he and his colleagues had spearheaded the campaign against fraud, I thought back to his remarks in July 1993 when he said that the extent of fraud in the system was overstated and that we should not get things out of proportion. He described the problem at that stage as a small one.

Mr. Bradley: Does the Minister support the view of the then Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt)? Referring to my speech on that occasion, he said:

> "The Opposition spokesman has been equally determined to show that the Labour party is as rigorous about fraud and abuse as it is about ensuring that everyone gets his just deserts."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 1250.]

Mr. Heald: I think that my hon. Friend was being rather kind because it was a Friday; he is certainly a fair man. As I shall make clear in a moment, the hon. Gentleman made a number of suggestions, all of which were wrong and have subsequently been disproved by events, so I shall not take any advice from him on the subject.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) raised a number of issues that I shall deal with immediately. There is no mystery about the targets. The figure for the 1998-99 target is £2.5 billion. That is

[Mr. Heald]

made up of all the various forms of fraud activity relating to the Benefits Agency in that one year. It also includes the work of the Employment Service which, of course, will by then have been amalgamated with that of the Benefits Agency, and that of local authorities.

The other figure of £2.5 billion that has been mentioned is the spend-to-save figure. The Government's proposals—the expenditure of £103 million this year on the security and control programme and of further sums over a future three-year period—will produce savings of £2.5 billion. If the hon. Gentleman requires further information, I shall be happy to write to him with more details.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury also spoke about the work of the Comptroller and Auditor General, suggesting that he was in some way critical of the Government's work on benefit fraud. That is far from being the case—the Comptroller and Auditor General commended the Department and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for their energetic approach to tackling benefit fraud. Although he was saying, as he has for many years, that he wished to qualify the accounts because there was a high level of fraud, and although he recognised that the benefit review had established the true level of fraud, there is no question but that he was complimenting the Department on its work.

The hon. Gentleman went on to talk about means testing.

Mr. Frank Field: If the Comptroller and Auditor General is so pleased, does the Minister think that he will sign the accounts next year?

Mr. Heald: I think that I covered that point. Obviously, where there is a high level of benefit fraud, it is extremely difficult for him to do so. The research that the Department has undertaken to establish the level of fraud is the basis on which that decision will be made.

It is all very well and good for the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury to criticise the increase in means testing and say that he feels that it increases the scope of fraud, but the corollary of that, if he means it, is that he is prepared to change the system to less means testing, and the disadvantages that that would bring. That point was put to him time and again and he was not prepared to make such a commitment. The Labour party has proposed a guaranteed minimum pension that, far from cutting means testing, would involve means testing everybody at state pension age. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that will help, I suggest that he is wrong.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury talked about what he described as self-assessment. It is true that there is an element of self-assessment in disability benefits where claimants describe their conditions on the forms that they fill in. Such self-assessment is well established. The hon. Gentleman is confusing self-assessment with the tightening up and simplifying of procedures that require benefit claimants to provide more information in documents, and so on, which is needed to establish and determine claims. I would not describe that as self-assessment, but if the hon. Gentleman does I would plead guilty. We ought to be looking at measures that put more of the onus on the individual in certain cases in order to simplify the system.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and a number of other hon. Members asked when we will have a uniform computer system, applying to all benefits, which will give ready access to personal details of and information about each claimant. That is being developed. It is part of the technology that underlies the benefit payment card and the private finance initiative to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Such a system will become available as we roll out the use of the benefit payment card, which the hon. Gentleman also criticised.

That PFI is on target. I cannot give the House all the details of it today, because the procurement process is still in hand. However, minimum standards and levels of security have been laid down by the Government and we are looking for proposals from the suppliers that meet that criteria. The suppliers will not be determining how the system works; they will be providing us with proposals so that we can determine the best way forward.

It is important to ensure that when the benefit payment card is introduced, elderly people find it accessible and easy to use. Sub-postmasters and those involved with the Post Office are determined to ensure that that happens. From speaking to the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, I know that that is its view. We are also having discussions with groups that represent the elderly to ensure that the card is introduced in a form that is acceptable to the elderly, that they are given the necessary information and that the card is effective.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury described the blanket visiting system as something we should look back on with pride and restore immediately. It is a question not only of the number of visits but of the intelligence and the information through data matching that can be given to the fraud investigator, so that when they go out on a call they know that they are visiting somebody who is likely to be a benefit fraudster. We are trying to target the visits far more. I am not saying that everyone who receives a visit is a potential fraudster. We are merely trying to underline the visiting process with intelligent technology that helps the fraud investigator. That is far better than simply sending large numbers of people to visit on a cold-canvass basis.

I applaud the work of local authorities, but I must say that they were goaded into doing it. The hon. Member for Withington described how well certain Labour councils have done. I do not disagree with him, but they have been goaded into it. The hon. Gentleman should remember that he said that the tough targets, incentives and penalties that we proposed in 1993 were unrealistically high and should be reconsidered. He has not said that the Government have done well and have put the right incentives in place to encourage local authorities to perform. He was wrong about that. What happened the year after he said that the targets were unrealistically high? Local authorities doubled the amount of money that they recovered.

Mr. Chris Smith: My hon. Friend the Member for Withington was right to say that the targets were far too challenging for authorities such as the Isles of Scilly, Upper Teesdale and South Bedfordshire—none of which

is Labour controlled. But they were not too tough for high-performing Labour local authorities, such as Camden and Haringey.

Mr. Heald: I am not sure if that was a question. I might add that the target of £150 million proposed for next year has been exceeded this year.

Mr. Jenkin: I have become increasingly aware during the debate of a trap into which we have been in danger of falling, and the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has fallen head first into it. We do not want a system in which the more fraud we find, the more pleased we are, because that will underline how much fraud we are letting through the system in the first place.

Mr. Heald: As usual, my hon. Friend is right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is trying to change the system from one in which we chase benefit fraudsters to one in which we prevent and deter benefit fraud. That is what the technological innovations introduced last year were all about.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury referred to telephone hot lines—an idea that we have piloted successfully in the past few months—and suggested that they had been dreamed up by Reading borough council. I pay tribute to Reading borough council, but the hon. Gentleman is being unfair to the Benefits Agency at Barrow-in-Furness, which piloted the scheme long before Reading. He was right to state that Reading has worked with the Benefits Agency to launch the "fraudwatch" campaign, and he was also correct in saying that we would like to take forward the hot line initiative now we have seen how well it works. The Government should also be entitled to take some credit for the idea.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury raised the issue of challenge funding, and seemed to suggest that £8 million was insufficient. I ask him—how much would Labour put into a challenge funding system? Answer comes there none. His eight measures to solve the problem were a mixture of things that we are doing already and things that would make no difference. It reminded me of the good old Liberals at local government by-elections who, having researched what the ruling group on the council was about to do, would produce a leaflet containing all those ideas as if they had come from the Liberals. Lo and behold, those schemes would be implemented two weeks later, as planned.

The first of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury's policies referred to the scrapping of moves towards self-assessment. I believe that he is confused. The Government are looking at tightening procedures and putting the onus of proof more on the benefit claimant to create a more effective system. The hon. Gentleman confuses that with the sort of self-assessment, which is simply a matter of what the person says on the form. I do not think that he understood what was proposed.

The hon. Gentleman's second point was that we should establish a special unit across London to deal with organised fraud. We welcome that idea and want to see it happen.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government have been sitting on it for four years.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman says that we have been sitting on it for four years. In fact, we have been discussing the subject with the London boroughs fraud investigators group and the London team against fraud since October. We are waiting for their written proposals and, when we receive them, we shall discuss them.

The hon. Gentleman's third point was that we should give local authorities the right to obtain proof of ownership of property. They already investigate the status of landlords; they conduct searches and are entitled to suspend benefits while they do so.

The hon. Gentleman suggested tightening up on national insurance numbers. We have already introduced a new system to tighten up the allocation of national insurance numbers. We tag numbers that are not being used and we are working on other measures to make the system more effective. There is nothing extra that can be done to make the system of national insurance numbers more effective. In a moment I shall come to some of the other points that were made on that subject by the hon. Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe).

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury spoke of ending the "finders, keepers" system. If we did that, with what would we replace it? At present, the benefits are awarded to the investigation team that has recovered them. If we were to award the benefits without considering who had successfully investigated them, that would be a huge disincentive to the effective investigation of fraud.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the Benefits Agency fraud figures should be checked even more. They are already checked four times, including a final check by the National Audit Office.

The hon. Gentleman talked about using postal redirect data. We do that with organised fraud and are negotiating to extend it into other areas.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman talked about employment offices telling local authorities when claims cease. As he said, that already happens in relation to income support and we shall introduce it for jobseeker's allowance which is income related. When the new computer system with single accounts is in place, we shall also be able to introduce that measure for other contributory benefits.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset made a number of points in his full and detailed contribution. He suggested that home visits were a good idea, which is clearly right. He called for more telephone calls—those checks are being made and we shall certainly consider making more of them.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the effect of incapacity benefit. It is too early to say precisely how many fraudulent cases have ended as a result of the new test. I shall ensure that when that information becomes clearer, my hon. Friend is informed of it.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the Post Office reward scheme. I pay tribute to the Post Office. The workers at the counters have taken the Post Office reward scheme to heart. In the first few months, they have already saved £4 million in benefit order books that have been returned.

Mr. Jenkin: Of the 392,000 benefit cheats said to have been caught by the Benefits Agency, how many have been prosecuted in the courts?

Mr. Heald: The decision to prosecute is taken on the basis of persistence and value in benefit fraud claims. The number of prosecutions is approximately 10,000 per

[Mr. Heald]

annum. That figure is not as high as my hon. Friend may wish, but the interesting point is that the sentences that are passed in respect of the convictions on those 10,000 cases are by no means substantial. We need to reconsider the issue of the number of prosecutions and the way in which they are handled. My hon. Friend is right to raise that important point.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): The Minister has gone through a huge list of things that the Government have been doing to overcome fraud, but fraud causes losses. What is wrong with the Government's policy?

Mr. Heald: The Government's policy is to tackle the problem at its roots. We are researching where benefit fraud occurs and putting into place the measures that are needed, such as new technology and more visits. We are doing the things that are needed to tackle the problem. It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to sit there as though the Labour party has had idea after idea on benefit fraud which we have rejected. What have the Opposition ever come up with? We have researched what they have said. They have never had an idea about how to tackle benefit fraud.

I believe that the fraudster has no future, given the proposals that the Government are implementing. Only the Government can say that. I challenge the Opposition to tell us what their policies would be. We are devoting resources to the problem and have a clear strategy and proven achievement. What more would they do to solve the problem? It is not so long ago that they were treating it as a minor problem. They described estimates of fraud of £1 billion as

"overstating the amount of fraud in the system".

The Labour party said:

"The problem after all is small."

By careful research, we have proved that it is not small. We are taking a range of measures that will put the benefit fraudster out of business. The Opposition were wrong; we were right.

When the benefit card was mooted, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who was then Labour's spokesman on social security, said:

"It is not a sensible and considered attempt to deal with the problem of social security fraud".

We estimate that it will save £150 million a year. Labour was wrong; we were right.

When we introduced new incentives and targets for local authorities, Labour described them as "unrealistically high" and asked for them to be reconsidered. We did not do so. Local authorities doubled the amount of fraud they detected. Labour was wrong; we were right. After all,

"the Labour party has been linked to 'free loaders' for too long."

Those are not my words but those of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) as recently as 1992. That attitude has not changed as completely as some suggest.

In the Social Security Select Committee, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) recently said:

"When we announced as a Committee that we were doing an inquiry into benefit fraud, one of my colleagues sidled up and said, 'Typical! Another right wing strategy from you.'"

That attitude was wrong. We welcome the support of the Select Committee and we are right.

The senior housing officer at Hackney, Bernard Crofton, who was suspended for uncovering benefit fraud, described to the Social Security Select Committee the attitudes that he encountered to it in Labour-controlled Hackney. It was suggested that any attack on benefit fraud was an attack on the welfare state. He described the "unwitting collusion" with fraud; that people simply did not want to know about it. Those attitudes were wrong. We are right to tackle benefit fraud head on.

The Government want to deal with the problem and are introducing the measures needed to do so. Labour was wrong about the scale of the problem; wrong to oppose our targets and incentives for local authorities; wrong to argue against the benefit payment card; wrong to criticise the Social Security Select Committee for taking up the issue; wrong on attitudes in Hackney—wrong, time and again. We welcome Labour's apparent conversion tonight and I invite Labour Members to join us in the Lobby.

Today's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of the new area fraud drives is the next tightening of the knot in the fight against benefit fraud. I apologise to hon. Members who took part in the debate whose points I have not had an opportunity to answer. I will answer them in writing. Today's announcements bring together all the various initiatives that deal with benefit fraud to bear on particular areas at particular times. We are convinced that that approach will get nearer to the heart of the fraud problem.

We will have benefit hot lines; data matching; more visits to both existing and new claimants; bar code scanners; and drives against collusive employers, landlords, and self-employed workers who are known to be at risk, using the intelligence that we have gained from the new technologies that we have introduced. We want to pay the right amount of money to the right people at the right time, because every pound that is wasted in benefit fraud is a pound that is not available to the needy. The Government are tackling the issue and I say to all those who are committing, or considering committing, benefit fraud, "Watch out, because we are after you and we will catch the benefit fraudsters in Britain."

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 231, Noes 305.

Division No. 68] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Betts, Clive
Ainger, Nick	Blunkett, David
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Boateng, Paul
Allen, Graham	Bradley, Keith
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Burden, Richard
Armstrong, Hilary	Byers, Stephen
Ashton, Joe	Callaghan, Jim
Austin-Walker, John	Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Barnes, Harry	Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Barron, Kevin	Campbell-Savours, D N
Battle, John	Canavan, Dennis
Bayley, Hugh	Cann, Jamie
Bell, Stuart	Chisholm, Malcolm
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Church, Judith
Bennett, Andrew F	Clapham, Michael
Benton, Joe	Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Bermingham, Gerald	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Berry, Roger	Clelland, David

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mr. Eric Clarke.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger

Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCrea, The Reverend William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Dr. Liam Fox.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on the priority it has given to tackling benefit fraud, increasing success in detecting and stopping fraud, in particular in achieving benefit savings likely to amount to £1 billion in 1995/96; welcomes the creation of the new Benefit Fraud Investigation Service; commends Her Majesty's Government's proposals to step up its measures against Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit fraud; endorses the increasing emphasis on preventing and deterring fraud; and condemns Labour's lack of positive proposals for tackling fraud. the main question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Children and Young Persons

That the draft Children Act 1989 (Amendment) (Children's Services Planning) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.

Contracting Out

That the draft Secretary of State's Trunk Road Functions (Contracting Out) (Scotland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

COURT OF AUDITORS (REPORTS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

That this House takes note of Official Journal No. C303 of 14th November 1995, the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors concerning the financial year 1994, together with the Institutions' Replies, and Official Journal No. C352 of 30th December 1995, the Court of Auditors Statements of Assurance concerning activities financed from the general budget for the financial year 1994 and of the Sixth and Seventh European Development Funds for 1994, together with the associated special reports and the Institutions' Replies; welcomes the Court of Auditors first Statements of Assurance; and supports the Government's continuing efforts to improve financial management and control within the European Community.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

The House divided: Ayes 237, Noes 17.

Division No. 69] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riffkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael

Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Canavan, Dennis
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
McCrea, The Reverend William
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Simpson, Alan
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Wilkinson, John
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

PETITION

A27 (Worthing)

10.29 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): I beg to present a petition to this honourable House of Commons on behalf of my constituents and others. The petition is signed by more than 15,000 members of the public.

The petition reads:

This Petition of those opposed to the Government's proposals for the development of the A27 in Worthing and district Declares that: the Government's "preferred" route through Worthing is unacceptable and The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Transport to abandon it in favour of a genuine by-pass north of Cissbury Ring.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Chetwynd Barracks, Chilwell

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

10.30 pm

Sir Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I sincerely hope that this will be the last time that I need to trouble any Minister in order to clear the air and obtain an important assurance on the future use of what used to be called central ordnance depot, Chilwell, in my constituency, and was renamed only last year Chetwynd barracks in earnest of the Ministry of Defence's commitment to the area. I am glad to welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who shares, in terms of constituents, an interest in the future of the barracks.

I hope also to put before my hon. Friend the Minister the views of the Army Technical Support Agency unit, which is currently located at Chilwell, in view of the consultation document proposing relocation at Chertsey.

The name Chetwynd dates back to Viscount Chetwynd, who turned a green field site in my constituency into a key munitions factory during the 1914-18 war. At its peak during that period, it employed 10,000 people. Viscount Chetwynd showed great energy in organising the production of vast quantities of munitions when they were desperately needed. Records show that the factory produced 46,725 shells in 24 hours on 1 July 1918. Subsequently, tragedy struck, and there was a massive explosion in which 134 people were killed and 250 injured. But the work force carried on the next day.

It might be of interest to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces especially that a telegram from his grandfather was sent to Chilwell, which read:

"Please accept my sincere sympathy with you all in the misfortune that has overtaken your fine Factory and in the loss of valuable lives, those who have perished have died at their stations on the field of duty and those who have lost their dear ones should fortify themselves with this thought, the courage and spirit shown by all concerned both men and women command our admiration, and the decision to which you have all come to carry on without a break is worthy of the spirit which animates our soldiers in the field. I trust the injured are receiving every care."

At that time, my hon. Friend's grandfather had succeeded Lloyd George as the Minister for Munitions.

I played that bit of history because I wanted to explain how involved the local community is in Chilwell and its fortunes. Since the time of the 1914-18 war, the fortunes of Chilwell improved, but I am sad to say that, during the past 22 years that I have represented the constituency, its fortunes have declined. I do not want to dwell on the closure of COD Chilwell or 38 Reme workshops, or even the recent vehicles supplies division, because, at the end of the day it remains a valuable site with a loyal work force. There is an officers mess, a sergeants mess, and 200 refurbished houses. A security system is in place. It has many assets. As I have already suggested, it is very much part of the local scene. During the process involving the vehicle spares division, my hon. Friend the Minister showed great interest and concern and treated my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash and me with great courtesy. At that time, we discussed the 300 jobs that had been lost and that are being relocated at Telford. After that debate, my hon. Friend the Minister brought about the movement of 200 civilian jobs from Long Marston, reuniting the Royal

Engineers military and civilian forces. I understood that the plan was for this site to be used from 1997. That brought new hope to the region that the MOD saw a future in Chetwynd barracks.

Since then, as a result of the consultation over the relocation of the Army Technical Support Agency, some doubt has been cast on whether that will happen. As many as 200 or as few as 10 jobs are the figures that are being bandied about. The Minister has already confirmed by letter to me that 200 jobs will be relocated. I would welcome it if he could reaffirm that position.

Ironically, the reason why, in one paragraph, Chilwell was dismissed in the consultation document as a site for co-location of the ATSA was that the Royal Engineers Resources park would come to Chilwell and not leave enough room. It is difficult to accept that because, if one visits the site—I would be delighted if my hon. Friend the Minister ever could find the time to come to Chilwell—one would see that large buildings still stand empty and need redevelopment. The co-location document suggests that Chilwell is remote from its customer base, but I understand that the customer base that Chilwell handles is in the midlands and that meetings are often delayed for staff coming from Chertsey to conduct inspections.

We point out many other features in the submission to my hon. Friend the Minister. May I mention just a few. Chilwell has excellent communications by road, rail and air, with subsequently fewer travel-to-work problems. Staff are not paid extra salaries for working in the outer London area or for having scarce disciplines. Recruitment and retention is easier. Chilwell is accredited to ISO 9002 and will be reassessed to ISO 9001 this month. In past years, that commitment to quality has been paramount and Chertsey does not have that accreditation.

On main battle tanks, one of the reasons for Chertsey's selection is that all the roads around the Chilwell site were constructed to accommodate heavy "A" vehicles. Also, refuelling facilities are available and armoured vehicles are regularly in transit between various sites.

From my reading of the document, the most important fact seems to involve not the ATSA, but the need to maintain the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency on a site that is too big and is rented from Surrey county council and in which the ATSA section is a welcome lodger. The range of costs over 25 years is less relevant than the overall business case for the most efficient operation. The range of costs varies from £312 million at the lowest—the document's suggestion of the Chertsey cost—to £340 million, the highest. The cost for Old Dalby, another valuable site close to my constituency, is estimated at £324 million. Old Dalby is surely a runner if Chilwell cannot be re-examined.

Will the Minister carefully reconsider the case made, bearing it in mind that Chertsey is an expensive place for people to move to? Often, the people at Chilwell have already made as many as two or three moves. Many of them are committed to the region. It is difficult for anyone from the east midlands, with the price of property there, to move to a region such as Chertsey, where the opposite is the case. People who sell a property in Chertsey can buy a more attractive property if they move to the east midlands.

One should use the real interest in using sites owned by the MOD. There is a permanent interest in sites that it already owns. The track record of Chilwell and Old Dalby is excellent. The borough council is anxious to work alongside the MOD to secure the best possible use of this valuable asset, and I should like, if possible, to bring an all-party group representing the council and the planners to meet the Minister, at his convenience.

Already, parts of the site that have been available for the personal and domestic use of the community have shown how valuable it is. The old testing site on the far side of the Chilwell road now has a very attractive hotel and leisure centre and many shopping complexes, and it has always been very easy to sell houses built on the bits of the central ordnance depot site that have been released to the public. The site clearly has an alternative use, but, in view of all that I have said, it seems ironic that a site of 200 acres, containing all the valuable properties to which I have referred, should not be used in the way in which it has always been used—as a base for the MOD.

Over the years in which I have argued the case for Chilwell, there seems to have been an inexorable move to the south—regardless, I sometimes suspect, of best judgment. That was certainly true of 38 Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers workshops. Perhaps an independent audit by the National Audit Office might be worth while in regard to some of the figures involved in the overall business case.

I would welcome reassurance from my hon. Friend about the value of Chetwynd barracks, so that we can pledge to work for its maximum use in the context of the service that it gives our fighting forces and civilian jobs in an area that has been involved in the MOD since 1915.

10.41 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) on securing an Adjournment debate on the future of Chetwynd barracks in his constituency. It is obvious to all who know him well, as I do, how deeply and genuinely he cares about the county of Nottinghamshire, where he was born and educated, in which his roots lie and whose people whom he represents so ably. This is not the first occasion on which my hon. Friend has made representations on behalf of Chilwell, and I applaud his tenancious advocacy of his constituency interests.

I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) is present. She, too, has been an extremely doughty campaigner for the interests of Chilwell and the wider area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe knows from my discussions with him that I am fully aware of recent proposals affecting Chilwell. I have every sympathy with the vigour with which he argues his case, and his real desire to ensure that his constituents are not disadvantaged by decisions of this nature. Indeed, he and I met last month—together with our hon. Friend the Member for Erewash—to discuss proposals affecting Chilwell. I hope that he will forgive me if I set out again, for the benefit of other hon. Members, the background against which tonight's debate must be set.

Given the nature of the business that we conduct, my Department must constantly try to improve its efficiency and cost-effectiveness. We are wholly committed to obtaining the best value for money from the defence budget, and to maximising the capability of the front line. My hon. Friend knows very well that the only way in

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

which we shall be able to protect, extend and preserve the front line is by maintaining downward pressure on our costs. He will recall that that is what the defence costs study was all about.

Inevitably, there have been reductions in both service and civilian manpower in recent years, following both "Options for Change" and the defence costs study. Those reductions have been felt nationwide. Rationalisation has involved very painful decisions—decisions which, I acknowledge, bring immense disappointment to the areas affected.

But the process has brought long-term benefit in terms of increased efficiency and better value for money. In turn, that leaves our armed forces leaner and more capable. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that no finer compliment could be paid to the structure, organisation and effectiveness of the British armed forces than that the restructuring of the French armed forces is being conducted very much along the lines on which we have run our own.

I deal now with the points made by my hon. Friend. I am very mindful of Chilwell's traditional and historic association with the armed forces, which, as he rightly said, goes back some 80 years, to when the site housed the national shell-filling factory. I am grateful to him for telling me of the telegram that my grandfather sent to the factory after the appalling accident in 1918. I know that there is still a garden of remembrance there in memory of that terrible day.

Since then, the site has been used as a stores depot and, for 50 years, as a vehicle workshop. Given that proud and distinguished history of service, I naturally truly regret the reduction in staffing at Chilwell which my hon. Friend has outlined. None of these decisions has been taken lightly.

In December last year, I announced our proposals—subject to consultation—to collocate the five land divisions of the recently formed Army Technical Support Agency at a site, shared with the Defence Research and Evaluation Agency, in Chertsey in Surrey. ATSA, a mixed civilian/military manned agency which provides the Army with essential technical and engineering support, is currently located at sites in Chertsey, Malvern, Woolwich and Chilwell.

The collocation proposal arose as a result of follow-on work commissioned after a study in 1993. It concentrated principally on the business and organisational aspects of what were then the Director General Equipment Support (Army)'s technical branches and authorities, now part of the Army Technical Support Agency. It concluded that there was a compelling business case for collocation, and that it would result in a much more efficient operation, which would better serve the front line.

As a result, a very detailed appraisal has been carried out, which deals in greater depth with the business case and the building and works implications of collocating the divisions on to a single site. It concluded that an integrated ATSA located mainly on one site would enable the chief executive to make the best use of modern logistic support and management techniques and provide the optimum organisation to promote the most efficient delivery of technical support. An equally important consideration is, of course, the achievement of best value for money through rationalisation and standardisation. My hon. Friend knows that we can but pursue these options with great vigour.

ATSA must meet the needs of its customers in an efficient manner. The Army's equipments are becoming increasingly more technically complex and all key battle-winning weapons systems embody electronic as well as mechanical elements. Support for these essential items of equipment can best be provided by an integrated engineering team. The achievement of the agency's demanding efficiency targets, which have been agreed with the Treasury, assumes collocation of the land systems element of ATSA on a single site.

We have examined some 17 options for the future location of ATSA, 11 of which have been subjected to extremely close and detailed scrutiny. Doing the minimum, although the least disruptive to staff, is a non-starter. It would fail to realise the established advantages of collocation, and is one of the most expensive options.

The option of collocating ATSA at Chilwell was, as my hon. Friend knows, fully considered in the investment appraisal undertaken in support of the collocation study. After much careful thought, however, it was concluded that it was not a viable option. The costs associated with the requirement for a new build office block, the relocation of larger numbers of staff from other sites at Chertsey and Malvern and the remoteness from ATSA's customer base all counted against Chilwell being a suitable solution.

I assure my hon. Friend, and my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash, that in the light of the representations made tonight, we shall re-examine thoroughly the figures for Chilwell.

Collocation at Chertsey, as well as being the most cost-effective solution, is by far the most attractive from a business point of view. The agency's owner and major customers are at Andover, it is already geared to large armoured fighting vehicle support, and it has the best support facilities of any ATSA site. Neither, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe inferred, can we ignore the wider MOD interest in retaining the Chertsey site, for if ATSA were to leave Chertsey, the position of DERA there might be jeopardised.

The Department's preference for Chertsey would mean the loss of a further 102 civilian jobs in the directorate of technical services at Chetwynd barracks. As my hon. Friends the Members for Erewash and for Broxtowe know, I fully understand the anxiety felt by staff during the decision-making process. We have tried at all times to keep them as well informed as possible and I am very sympathetic to their concerns.

All ATSA's staff—whether at Chilwell or elsewhere—have provided first-class support to the armed forces, and we shall do all we can to find alternative MOD employment for those affected. There will inevitably be some redundancies, but we will ensure that they are handled as sensitively as possible.

I should make it clear that no final decision has yet been taken. We are carefully considering the many points made to us—not least by my hon. Friends the Member for Broxtowe and for Erewash tonight—during the consultation process. I will, of course, be happy to receive my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe—and my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash, if she wishes to come, too—with a delegation from the borough council if they would care to see me. I should be grateful if he could arrange that as soon as possible.

I turn to our plans to collocate the engineer resources organisation, which is located at Long Marston in Warwickshire, with the military work force at Chetwynd barracks. The engineer resources organisation includes a planning headquarters and the central engineer park, which stores large engineering equipment and plant that the organisation supplies in support of the Army and the RAF, and sometimes to other Government Departments.

The military work force at Chilwell occupies an area within Chetwynd barracks, and employs 154 military and 27 civilian staff who are responsible for providing military construction engineering support to the three armed services and other Government Departments, principally the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The decision to collocate the two units was taken because they have common areas of interest and some related responsibilities that will greatly benefit from closer co-operation and shared workplaces. Although much of the detailed work is highly specialised and unique to each organisation, they both usually deal with the same customer units or staff branches. In both operational and training deployments, they often contribute to the same construction projects and they have similar command and control arrangements.

As a result of the collocation at Chetwynd barracks, my Department will make substantial savings through the disposal of the Long Marston site and from sharing infrastructure overheads at Chilwell such as security, catering, grounds maintenance, and so on.

When the two units were scheduled to remain at their current locations, a study was started to examine the scope for in-house efficiencies and the feasibility of market testing the activities carried out by engineer resources. The military work force discharges a core military function, including potential front-line deployment, and for that reason was excluded from market testing. The move to Chilwell will postpone the market test of the engineer resources to allow it three years in its new location in which to work up an effective in-house bid.

The move of engineer resources to Chilwell followed the promise I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe, at the time of the announcement of the move of the vehicle spares division to Telford, to make every effort to find an alternative defence use for the Chilwell site.

In the debate, and in discussions with me, my hon. Friend has mentioned rumours, which inevitably circulate at such times, about a reduction in the number of new jobs that will be created at Chilwell following collocation. I have recently written to him to confirm that, although it is difficult to be precise about exact numbers at this stage, we are planning a probable increase of about 200 new civilian jobs for the area by the end of 1998. I know that he will welcome that further reassurance.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe knows, we must make every effort to ensure that the use of our scarce defence resources is focused on the business of preserving, enhancing and fortifying the front line. He will also understand that this reflects the general reduction in the area of support infrastructure in line with the policies following on from "Options for Change" and, more recently, from "Front Line First".

Chetwynd barracks has an assured future. In particular, the headquarters of 49 (Eastern) Brigade has a long-term future there, and, following the planned devolution and delegation of budgetary responsibility, we expect to see an increase of some 20 civilian jobs in the headquarters in the next 12 months. In addition, the collocation of engineer resources with the existing military work force—together with the associated headquarters of Chilwell station—will, I am happy to say, ensure that there continues to be a significant Army presence in Chilwell in the years ahead.

I want my hon. Friends the Members for Broxtowe and for Erewash to know that I am aware of the anxiety felt by their constituents about the moves, and we will study carefully the representations that have been made to us, as we always do in these cases. No decision will be made without the most detailed appreciation of all the facts.

Having dealt with such cases for nigh on two years following the defence cost studies, I know that no two colleagues could have done more than my hon. Friends to defend the interests of their constituents. Chilwell has given noble and distinguished service to the world of defence for many years, and it is assured of a bright future. It will be a changed future, but a bright one.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 6 March 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Education (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I appreciate the opportunity to raise the issue of education in Scotland, but what I really want to refer to is the crisis in education in Scotland. I am happy to see that hon. Members from all parties are in the Chamber, and I hope that they will all have an opportunity to express their views on a matter that concerns everybody in Scotland. Education is deeply rooted in our traditions, and I hope that there will be enough time to allow everyone who wishes to speak an opportunity to do so.

For centuries, education has been a Scottish priority. It is embedded in our national culture. Embedded in that culture also is a reverence for learning and an endeavour to provide the highest quality for all.

The traditional philosophical strengths of the Scottish system are there for all to see—a national comprehensive unified system from elementary through to university level, allowing each person to develop their abilities to the fullest, irrespective of wealth, background or any other consideration; a system staffed by an all-graduate-trained professional work force; a Scottish generalist flexible approach that is nowadays ideally suited to our ever-changing modern world, allied to an egalitarian attitude that ensures that the highest quality of education is available to all as of right.

In the Scottish tradition, high-quality education applies across the nation. The well-being, quality and accessibility of our education provision is of national and strategic importance to Scotland. In the past, we educated ourselves out of poverty. I want us now to educate ourselves into prosperity as we approach the future. Scotland's comprehensive education system is a model for success, but sustaining and building on it will require new resources.

The principle of equality of access to education is now under threat, and only an independent Scottish Parliament with real control over our resources will ensure that Scottish priorities once again hold sway. The Scottish education system is somewhat battered, but it is basically sound and strong. It is simply under-resourced, and the most serious threat faced by Scottish education in the long term is persistent underfunding. According to a survey carried out by the CBI in 1994, spending on secondary schools was only 88 per cent. of the OECD average, while the figure for primary schools was 78 per cent.

Everyone acknowledges the importance of early years education in Scotland, but we have a poor record of providing publicly funded pre-school education compared with other European countries. I want that record to be destroyed. I want Scotland to be at the forefront of Europe, instead of trailing behind other countries, as we are now.

There is a mood of crisis in Scottish education. There is frustration, as Scottish local authorities are made to carry the can for the Conservatives' botched reorganisation of Scottish local government. There is anger among Scottish teachers and parents at the fact that the children of Scotland will suffer as a result of the spending cuts forced on Scottish local authorities. That anger and frustration—if the Minister did not know about it—spilled out on to the streets of Edinburgh on Saturday 24 February, when 40,000 parents, teachers and pupils marched to protest against the cuts that threaten Scotland's education system.

It is clear that services will be put under severe strain. The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland anticipates that total cuts in education funding will range from 2 per cent. to 7 per cent.—possibly even more.

The predicted total cuts are estimated to be around £95 million. This week's changes give some authorities £38 million to hand back to council tax payers, with £30 million concentrated on only 10 authorities, but that does nothing to protect vital services. Education is, by definition, the single largest local authority service, and the largest provider of employment in local authorities. As such, it has been the victim of underfunding, not just this year, but in previous years. Reorganisation has merely brought to a head and served to deepen a crisis that was already affecting the funding of our education system and the morale of our teaching profession.

The Scottish School Boards Association has estimated that a local authority with an average education budget of £60 million will be facing a typical 10 per cent. cut. That would result in the loss of between 90 and 180 teaching jobs and around 40 non-teaching posts. The quality of education for Scotland's young people cannot help but suffer as a consequence. I am informed that, for an average council, the cuts will mean £4 less per primary school pupil and £7 less per secondary school pupil to spend on books and equipment.

I had the honour of listening to the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, in this very establishment describing his absolute policy of providing a computer for every Israeli child. In Scotland, we cannot even provide our children with books, never mind computers. That is a massive irony for one of Europe's major computer-producing countries. The percentage of books given to our pupils in Scotland is one of the lowest in Europe. It is about time that we caught up with the 21st century, instead of trailing. Scotland's once proud record can be restored only if we give our pupils the very best in modern technology and an advantage when they start out in their school career.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): It was probably a slip of the tongue on the hon. Gentleman's part, but as I understood it, Mr. Peres said at the meeting that he wanted to provide "access to" a computer for every child.

Mr. Welsh: I am happy to stand corrected—he did indeed. But I think that his long-term ambition would also

[Mr. Welsh]

be to match the two. I would be happy to see either in Scotland, and I think that the hon. Gentleman would share that ambition.

The cuts that the Government have forced on local authorities will mean between £100,000 and £200,000 taken from school maintenance budgets, larger classes, older equipment and reduced course choice. They will mean that services such as transport for school pupils will be cut to the statutory minimum and that special education needs provision will be cut, particularly on the residential side. During the debates on local government reorganisation, we were all worried about meeting the needs of children with specialist needs. The Minister must ensure that those needs are met, because those children are particularly vulnerable.

Language tuition will suffer, with the loss of foreign language assistants. They have always been a unique and special feature of the Scottish system. There will also be a reduction in exchanges—the opposite of Scotland in Europe. Scotland has always been internationalist-minded and had a connection with Europe, but we will find that language tuition will suffer because of the cuts.

As well as jobs being lost in teaching, there will be reductions in supply cover. At a time when greater and greater demands are being placed on the teaching profession, with the five-to-14 programme and "Higher Still", teachers face a reduction in the educational development service and service support. There will also be delays in the implementation of national guidelines—for example, for devolved school management. There will be a reduction in grants and subsidies to voluntary organisations and increases in charges for school meals, letting and music instruction. Schools operate not in a vacuum but within the wider community, and the cuts will affect the community and a school's relationship with it.

Charges for nursery education are being introduced, and thus, for the first time in Scotland, there is a retreat from the principle of free provision at the point of delivery. That is the situation to which the Government have brought us, and it is unacceptable.

A reduction in the community education service, including youth work and adult education provision, must follow from cuts. The closure of outdoor education and arts centres is threatened. For many people, community education is an access to the mainstream education system, and the access will simply be denied if that provision dries up or is limited.

There will be a reduction in support for key preventive education strategies—for example, in drugs, HIV and health education. That comes at a time when the Scottish Secretary is supposed to be spearheading a ministerial task force on drugs—his other policies are producing the opposite result. It is no wonder that 40,000 parents, teachers and pupils took to the streets of Edinburgh in protest. If that did not get through to the Minister, nothing will.

The general secretary of the biggest teaching trade union in Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland, Mr. Ronnie Smith, wrote to the Secretary of State on 29 November and 21 December 1995, seeking a meeting between the right hon. Gentleman and the EIS. It took nearly three months and the largest demonstration of its kind ever seen on the streets of Scotland's capital to evoke a response from the Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), and even then, it was only for him to offer his junior Minister. That says everything we need to know about the importance that the Government attach to Scottish education.

In each of Scotland's major cities, we can see where the axe is poised to fall. Glasgow estimates job losses, increased class sizes and reduced subject content. Glasgow's education department states that there will be

"closure of schools on an unprecedented scale and within a time frame that is driven by budgetary constraint".

In Aberdeen, a £24.5 million shortfall exists between the cost of providing services to the city and the capping limit determined by the Scottish Office, which will result in a 10 per cent. cut in its base budget. Aberdeen council states that education will have to bear a significant share of the cuts—a minimum of 6 per cent., or £6 million, taken out of the system. It goes on to say:

"redundancies and closures can be avoided in year one but given the reduction in compensation for the mismatch problem, additional burdens and the need to avoid a similar situation next year, significant rationalisation in 1997/98 is unavoidable."

It also says:

"a number of council staff jobs have been lost equivalent to at least 10 FTE or £300,000 cost."

The council also points to a significant impact on the private sector resulting from reductions in buildings and maintenance contracts. Education also affects other businesses within the community that it serves.

In Edinburgh, £2.3 million will be taken out of the education budget in net terms—1.5 per cent. of the total education budget will be lost. Community education will be reduced by 5 per cent., with the threatened closure of the theatre arts centre and the drama centre. By the end of the year, 100 fewer teachers will be employed in Edinburgh, although again there will be no compulsory redundancies, thankfully.

In Dundee, the education budget will be cut by 5 per cent., with the closure of two secondary schools, four primary schools and a £1 million reduction in expenditure on property maintenance. Happily, there will be no compulsory redundancies, but there will be an overall reduction of 30 teaching posts in 1996-97, and a further reduction of 20 teaching posts in the next two years.

In addition to the damage being done because of the Minister's budget, the Government are creating a blight on curricular development. The funding crisis, allied to resentment by teachers because of their excessive work load, are badly affecting the five-to-14 programme and "Higher Still". Research shows little progress with the environmental, expressive arts and religious and moral educational elements of the five-to-14 programme. In secondary schools, there may now actually be a regression away from that programme towards the traditional secondary 1/secondary 2 curricula, with some implementation in English and mathematics, but little in other subject areas.

The five-to-14 programme is a curricular revolution, rather than a development of existing principles, which is not easily compatible with the existing secondary school approaches to S1/S2, or with the pattern of subject-based teaching at secondary schools. There can be no meaningful implementation in secondary schools until the new curricula are in place in primary schools. If the reform had been adequately resourced, the morale of

teachers was higher and there had been no funding crisis, the reform might have had a chance. In the absence of those conditions, I am told that the future of the five-to-14 programme looks bleak, and that "Higher Still" may well turn out to be an expensive paper reform that will never be implemented.

So far, the Government have made no commitment to the on-going and recurrent costs of implementing "Higher Still". I give them fair warning that, from my reading of the mood of teaching profession, unless new and adequate resources are forthcoming, teachers will refuse to implement "Higher Still", which is part of a long line of Government-imposed changes. I participated in some of them when I taught in a secondary school and when I worked in further education.

The system has had a series of changes, such as the raising of the school leaving age or the implementation of the modular system in further education. The changes were introduced and back-up resources were promised, but they took two, three, four or five years to arrive. In the meantime, education staff were left to cope. Cope they did, but they have reached the end of their tether. They are saying that it is not on for the same thing to happen with "Higher Still". I hope that the Minister is aware of the teachers' mood, and is going out among the schools, because that impression has been given to me strongly. Will he make it clear what extra resources the Government will make available for the changes? Unless there is an early change of direction, the new Scottish qualifications authority may end up presiding over two entirely different examination systems.

The Scottish education system has its own well understood fundamental principles that the Government are endangering with the imposition of alien ideas, unwanted by teachers or parents. There is a consensus across the whole of Scotland on common goals, ideas and educational philosophy, but the Government are not part of it. It is time they listened rather than dictating events to suit themselves.

The Government's proposed nursery voucher scheme will soon have to be debated. Concerns are being expressed in another place that that scheme is the thin end of the wedge.

How long will it be before the Government start to regard the market as a solution to the problem of educational provision instead of concentrating on the mainstream bulk of Scottish education? That is where improvements and changes should be made—to the national system that provides education for 98 per cent. of our children. Nursery and pre-school education should be a natural part of Scotland's national education system, with places available for all three or four-year-olds whose parents wish them to have pre-school education.

At the upper end of the scale, there is chronic underfunding of the Scotland's world-renowned higher education system. Scottish further and higher education has been suffering from a near 30 per cent. real terms reduction in unit funding over the past six years, culminating in 1995 with a 4.5 per cent. cut, in addition to a forecast overall cut in resources of some 10 per cent. That is all against the background of a 50 per cent. increase in student numbers since the late 1980s. The very success of further and higher education has been turned into a problem by the Government.

The higher education sector has reached a near 40 per cent. participation rate in Scotland—the Government's official target for the year 2000. Yet its reward has been projected further cuts of 10.2 per cent. in real terms by 1998-99, on top of the 28 per cent. cuts over the past six years. The Secretary of State is responsible for that situation. He may try to pass the buck over primary and secondary education to local authorities, but he cannot duck—there is no hiding place—his cuts on higher education.

Funding for individual institutions will be announced on 14 March, but the overall funding package is already known, and has caused widespread concern. Resources for 1996-97 have been cut. The Minister seems pained by that. He obviously does not know that resources have been cut by £7 million on top of the 3 per cent. efficiency savings, with reductions for future years of around 4 per cent. He might not know that, but the providers of education do, because they have to cope with it, as they have had to cope with the £6 million cut in last year's capital budget.

The effects of the Government's funding failures are already to be seen in deteriorating buildings, poor access to equipment, under-resourced libraries and overworked staff. One university reports that units of resource per student have declined by 30 per cent. in the past seven years. That is all happening in a service that is a major income earner for Scotland.

In 1993-94, Scottish universities attracted £536 million to Scotland from overseas students, through research income and in their role as employers and users of local services and businesses. Universities are major players in city economies. For every £100 they generate, they create an extra £79 of economic benefit elsewhere. For every 100 full-time equivalent jobs, they add 124 elsewhere. The Government's failure to invest in education is holding back Scotland's economy and creating unemployment, while their downright barbaric attitude to student grants is limiting access to universities for young Scots.

Scottish universities and colleges should be open to all with the ability to benefit from them, not rationed in the way that the Government have done. The Minister does not seem to know it, but an estimated capital investment of £700 million will be required over the next decade. I wonder whether he will say today whether that will be forthcoming. His policies so far have led us to the opposite conclusion.

Let us contrast the Government's failure and under-resourcing with the Scottish National party's detailed proposals, which allocate an additional £1.3 billion of resources to Scotland's local authorities in the first four years of an independent Scottish Parliament.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): Where will it come from?

Mr. Welsh: The Minister need not ask where we will get it from. I will be happy to let him read our booklet. We are the only party that has detailed in pounds and pence where we will spend money. If he wants to find a party that runs away from spending commitments, he need only look across to the Labour Front Bench. The SNP has clearly shown where the money will come from.

The £8 billion deficit is a figment of the Minister's imagination. The real tartan tax is the subsidy from Scotland to England. The Minister may not know it, but

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I advise him to read the Government's own figures, which show that, in the worst scenario, Scotland, with 8.8 per cent. of the United Kingdom's population, provides 9.3 per cent. of all UK taxation. The real tartan tax is the subsidy of £10 per taxpayer per week from Scotland to the London Treasury.

In return, we get the Minister's pocket money. He cannot fund Scotland's education or local authorities, because he is getting a fixed, pocket money budget from the Treasury. His policies are Treasury-dominated. The £8.8 billion deficit exists only in his mind. All he can do is to play down his country and pretend that we are not one of the richest oil-producing countries in the world.

Why, with 7.5 billion tonnes of oil and gas reserves in Scottish territorial waters, is such a country talking about cuts, closures and unemployment? Instead of the problems of poverty that the Minister's pocket money budget imposes on us, Scotland should be dealing with the problems of prosperity. We have the resources, but we can exploit them only through independence. He offers us only the dependency culture—the begging bowl—approach of Unionism. That is the past; Scotland's future, as the people are deciding, is with independence and a Scottish Parliament, so that resources can be used for the things that we want in Scotland.

Our costed budget, in the first four years of a Scots Parliament, would provide more teachers, refurbish schools, and ensure nursery places in the national school system for every three or four-year-old whose parents wish it. With independence, Scotland's further and higher education institutions would meet the strategic needs of the nation and supply the highest-quality educational provision to the wider world.

The system is fundamentally strong, and based on deep-rooted Scottish values. Given the resourcing and priority it requires, Scotland's education system will once again be the envy of the world. That, and nothing less, should be our goal.

9.58 am

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye in this important debate. I was a little worried earlier that not many hon. Members would attend the debate, but it is better attended than the debate last Wednesday morning on education in England. I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), whom many of us regard more as a housing than as an education spokesman, if he will forgive me for saying so.

I am pleased also to see a full complement of hon. Members from the Scottish National party. There are only four of them at present, and I suspect that there will be fewer still after the next general election. I wish my very good friend John Godfrey, the prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate for Perth, the best of luck. Opposition Members will be pleased to know that, while I am more than capable of making a long speech about Scottish education, I shall not do so, as a number of hon. Members are present and they wish to make their own contributions.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will seek to catch your eye also, Madam Deputy Speaker.

At a time when the interests of our economy are best served by reducing the public sector borrowing requirement and our overall level of public expenditure, the Government have set out their priorities in both education and health. Despite the fact that the PSBR fell from £35.9 billion to £29 billion this year, spending on education and health are priorities—particularly higher education—in Scotland, where spending will be £621 million in 1995-96, which is an increase of 4.2 per cent. on last year. In the December public expenditure survey statement, the Scottish Office education budget was maintained at a record level of £1,277 million.

However, Conservative Members are not convinced that only increased expenditure will radically improve standards in Scottish education. The education reforms that we have implemented throughout the United Kingdom are founded on our belief in devolving management of schools from Government to the schools, on parental involvement and on traditional teaching methods of instructing children in the subjects set out in the national curriculum. Teaching methods are particularly important, and the Office for Standards in Education has made it clear that their selection and application and the form of class organisation have a greater impact on learning than class sizes.

I welcome the fact that, from 1 April, bad teachers who are sacked by local education authorities will not have their dismissals referred to local education committees. We will abolish that long-winded, time-wasting procedure which makes it almost impossible to get rid of bad teachers.

Mr. Welsh: It is quite insulting to the Scottish education profession for the hon. Gentleman to talk about bad teachers in that manner. Does he not understand that one of our traditional strengths is a fully qualified, graduate teaching profession? If teachers have problems, they can be solved within the counselling system. They can receive the help they require in order to perform better, or they may decide to change careers. It is wrong merely to blame bad teachers or bad schools. Instead of moaning about teachers, the Government should fix the problems.

Mr. Banks: I am talking about a tiny minority of teachers. However, I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the remarks of the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) which appeared in *The Scotsman* earlier this week—perhaps she will expand on them later in the debate. It appears that the Labour party is coming closer to the Government's policies: I welcome the fact that it seems to support some of the actions of Scottish Office Ministers.

The 1981 parents charter began the process of parental involvement, which has progressed through its 1991 and 1995 follow-ups. School boards were created in 1988, and they have given parents a role in running schools. They have now been established in more than 90 per cent. of Scottish secondary schools. The implications for local authorities of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the Education Act 1993 were to extend choice to parents, governors and head teachers, centralise control of the curriculum and pass control of school inspections to Ofsted.

I shall point out how those changes advantage Scotland. Devolved management has encouraged flexibility and responsiveness by allowing decisions to be taken closer

to the Scottish people. Decisions are taken not just in the House and in London, but by local authorities. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I hope that those hon. Members who are engaging in repeated seated interventions do not hope to catch my eye to speak later in the debate.

Mr. Banks: That is true devolution: powers have been granted to parents without the need to establish alternative institutions and bureaucracy either here or in Edinburgh. Because there are no jobs, titles or sinecures for Opposition Members, it does not mean that their constituents will not benefit from the Government's policies. One has only to look at the success of Dornoch academy in Sutherland and its welcome expansion to six-year status to see the beneficial effects of schools governing themselves.

The Government's objectives—including the devolution to schools of at least 80 per cent. of local spending and schools having the controlling interest in staff selection—should be contrasted with the outdated paternalism of the Labour party. The introduction of nursery vouchers by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is widely welcomed.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): By whom?

Mr. Banks: It is welcomed by parents, but I shall come to that point in a moment—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will comment on it also.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: If I had plenty of time, I would love to give way to the hon. Lady. However, I promised the House that my remarks would be brief—it must be obvious to hon. Members that I am speaking more quickly than I would like. However, they should take care, because I could speak for much longer than they might wish.

I am pleased that the assisted places scheme will deliver further choice to parents. I emphasise that it has come about as a result of direct expenditure by the Scottish Office. I hope that the number of pupils taking advantage of the assisted places scheme will increase from 3,000 to 6,000. We want to give parents greater choice.

I commend the Scottish authorities that have taken part in the initial nursery voucher schemes. I wish those parents in North Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Argyll and Bute, and Highland the best of luck. I hope that vouchers valued at £1,100 or more will be made available to parents throughout Scotland, rather than in only a few authorities. I warmly welcome that measure, which gives parents unprecedented choice.

Unfortunately, education has been caught up in the uproar surrounding the reorganisation of local government. The hon. Member for Angus, East touched on that point, although I did not agree with everything he said—in fact, I think that, in Kilmarnock, he ran foul of the problems to which he alluded.

It is interesting to note that an extra £186 million has been allocated to Scottish councils this year. Current expenditure levels are more than 30 per cent. higher in Scotland than in England, yet we hear claims about the denigration of Scottish local democracy by central Government. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement on Monday of an extra £96 million for local authorities—including £58 million to safeguard front-line services, such as education—is motivated more by the need to help the oppressed council tax payer than by a desire to feed local authorities' addiction to more central funding.

The spendthrift behaviour of many of the outgoing regional and district authorities resembles that of a national lottery winner with only a few weeks to live. The new unitary authorities will suffer the consequences. Local reorganisation has been used by extremists—epitomised by one or two Opposition Members—simply as an excuse to make mischief. The Scottish National party's high-tax, high-spending agenda for Scotland is matched in its lunacy only by the foolishness of the Labour party, which sniggers in the background at the antics of the nationalists.

The hon. Member for Angus, East waved around a document containing many figures about where his party intends to spend money. However, he did not answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary about where the money would come from. Conservative education policies make a rounded whole. The five-to-14 development programme, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, includes the three interlinked elements of the curriculum, testing and reporting on progress to parents. The five main areas of study seem to have struck the right balance between learning the basics and learning new subjects relevant to the future, such as environmental studies.

The aim of our recent legislation has been to make schools more responsive and accountable to individual choice, and to involve employers and the wider community. It is well known that education in Scotland—as in the rest of the United Kingdom—has been too distant from the needs of industry. The technical and vocational education initiative—which I think was pioneered by the President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang)—is a fine programme, as is the compacts initiative. I warmly welcome the initiatives, which give students who perform well in Scotland a greater chance of a job when they leave school.

The latest reports of educational standards are encouraging. In November 1995 there was an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving three or more standard grade awards in the fourth year, and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more awards at the top level increased by 4 per cent. Participation of young Scots in higher education was more than 38 per cent. last year, compared with 17 per cent. under Labour.

I hope that the new local authorities that come into force on 1 April will be able to consult parents who are concerned about the future rationalisation of school places following the Accounts Commission for Scotland's identification of some 300,000 surplus school places. While I accept that that figure must be qualified by geographical and other considerations, there is still room for substantial improvement.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): My hon. Friend will be aware of the considerable outcry from local authorities in

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

Scotland that claim that they are under-funded. Is it not the case that in Scotland, particularly in the Strathclyde region and in Glasgow, Labour councillors have failed to come to grips with the problems of too many schools not being maintained well enough?

Mr. Banks: I am glad to see my hon. Friend in his place. He has raised an important point, and he will recognise that it is a matter for local councils and the geographical factors to which I have alluded.

I will devote as much attention to the policies of the Scottish National party as I think is due. I am conscious of the fact that, in 1989, it wasted time during the Budget to draw attention to the fact that more power was being devolved to parents north of the border. If ever there was an example of the Scottish National party being against choice, that was it. It has a long history of trying to scupper the Government's policies of devolving more power to parents and to schools.

I have no doubt that new Labour will continue to adopt many of the policies of the Conservative party, as it appears to be doing already—it is beginning to show the courage of our old convictions. However, it can never adopt our core beliefs, because choice and the minimisation of bureaucracy are not part of the socialist gospel or of the new Labour soundbite.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): This is good.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Member for saying that it is good, because I could spend the next half hour or so going into much more detail.

Samuel Johnson is quoted as follows in Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* of 1775:

"All knowledge is of itself of some value. There is nothing so minute or inconsiderable, that I would not rather know it than not."

Obviously, he could never have anticipated knowing Labour party education policy.

10.14 am

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) spoke for such a long time but said so little.

My constituency has an exceptional quality of education, and the following secondary schools are at the top of the list of achievement by any standards throughout Scotland: Turbull high, Bishopbriggs high, Tuos Muir high, Lenzie academy, St. Ninians, Kirkintilloch high, Boclair and Bearsden academy. It was expected that these top schools would opt out under the Government's education reforms in the last Parliament, but not one of the schools in my constituency has expressed an interest in doing so.

The staff and the parents are content with the services provided by Strathclyde regional council—a Labour council. They have continued in that compact between the schools, the parents and the society in which they live, which is the basis on which good-quality education is delivered.

We cannot separate schools from society—when we were at school, there was a compact between school and society, and that was the basis of good education. It was understood that, if one went to school, worked hard and obtained qualifications, one could move on to higher education and achieve a job. That process has broken down under the Government, and that compact has been split—and there is no doubt that there are falling standards and an increase in truancy as a result of the breakdown in society.

The schools in my constituency are full: there are no spare places and there are no spare schools. Under the local authority settlement, savings are supposed to be made within the education budget based on the assumption that there will be empty schools that can be closed. That cannot be done in my constituency: every school is completely full. However, we are asked to make the same cuts as other areas.

I ask the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to consider that point. It is no good there being an average, because some areas will be above it and some areas will be below it—and it poses particular problems in my area. We do not have spare places, and we have placement requests because of the quality of the education in the area.

Mr. Gallie *rose—*

Mr. Galbraith: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because other hon. Members wish to speak.

We have good-quality schooling for pupils with learning difficulties. However, pupils with special educational needs have to go outside the area—they are no longer part of the Strathclyde system—which is causing problems. The number of places available for pupils with specific learning disorders is inadequate, so they will be wrongly placed in other schools, to the detriment of their education.

I plead with the Minister to listen to local authorities and to look at the provision of facilities for children with specific learning needs. These children have a bad start to life as it is, so it is our duty to ensure that we do everything in our power to deliver a better service. There is much else that I wish to say, but if I have got through to the Minister the need for extra places for those with learning difficulties and other specific learning needs, I will have done some good in this debate.

10.18 am

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on succeeding in obtaining this debate and on the way in which he presented his case. Although I do not agree with everything he said, particularly in the latter part of his speech, he presented a broad canvas of the serious problems and difficulties currently facing Scottish education.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) referred to children with special needs. The nursery voucher scheme makes no provision for them. It is arguable whether £1,100 would pay for a nursery place for a child without special needs. We have heard little to date to give us any reassurance about provision for children with special educational needs, although Ministers have had plenty of opportunities to debate the issue.

Although such councils as Highland, and Argyll and Bute, which offer precious little nursery provision, may well gain from the nursery vouchers scheme, nursery

provision is inconsistent across Scotland. Western Isles provides no nursery education, while the cities and Grampian offer high provision of nursery education for three and four-year-olds.

Will the commitment to nursery education for four-year-olds affect education authorities that currently provide nursery education for three-year-olds? Will their nursery provision be compromised to ensure that sufficient resources are available for four-year-olds? What will happen to parents who are given vouchers but are unable to cash them in because of the lack of provision? I have heard nothing so far to satisfy my hon. Friends or myself that there will be sufficient resources in the system to train the exceptionally large number of teachers that will be required to deliver nursery education—

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Or capital.

Mr. Wallace: Indeed.

When I raised the matter with the Secretary of State in Stirling, his reply was frightening. He suggested that having properly trained teachers was perhaps aspiring to the ideal. It is far from ideal; I hope that it will be the reality: otherwise, the Government's proposals are for nursery education on the cheap.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the debate in Stirling. He may remember that I asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he had previously advocated vouchers not just for nursery education, but for primary, secondary and tertiary education, and received an evasive answer. Will he join me in asking the Minister for clarification as to whether that was previously the view of the Secretary of State for Scotland?

Mr. Wallace: I certainly remember the question and the vague answer. I do not know whether that was the case in the past. Perhaps the Minister will be able to help us with that. However, we would welcome some assurance that it is not the Government's policy.

In primary and secondary schools, there is a crisis in the provision of books and equipment. We have a backlog of repairs and maintenance to Scottish school buildings amounting to some £450 million. As the Scottish Office could not give me the figures, I wrote to every education authority in Scotland in spring 1994. When I wrote to them again last summer, the figure had risen to £500 million. It is still increasing, and nothing in the most recent local government settlement suggests that it will be tackled.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) mentioned the five-to-14 curriculum development. Although there has been progress in maths and English in our primary schools, there is some concern about curriculum development in environmental studies, expressive arts and religious and moral education. One cannot help thinking that the financial pressure on many new local authorities will put further constraints on much-needed progress in those matters.

In secondary 1 and secondary 2, implementation of the five-to-14 curriculum has not been as far reaching as everyone had hoped. Perhaps it would be useful if the Minister could let us know what research has been conducted and what assistance or encouragement is being given to developing the five-to-14 curriculum in the first two years of secondary education.

The hon. Member for Angus, East also mentioned the question marks over "Higher Still". The Government have made no commitment to the on-going and recurring costs of implementing "Higher Still". Will the Minister say whether the timetable is current and what further assistance will be given in regard to course preparation and the pressure on staff who have to deliver a new curriculum?

Higher education has suffered a 30 per cent. real terms reduction in unit funding over the past six years, with a further 4.5 per cent. cut promised for next year. Everyone welcomes the growth in student numbers, but no account has been taken of the consequences. Lecture theatres are overflowing, and science students do not have sufficient laboratory space. For students, timeshare means how long they are allowed to sit in the library and read, because books are in such demand.

The concern about funding that has been expressed by the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals should not be overlooked by the committee of inquiry into higher education in the United Kingdom under Sir Ron Dearing. Professor Graham Davies, the principal of Glasgow university, highlighted the concern that up to 6,000 jobs could be lost—not only directly in higher education but among the spin-off jobs that relate to higher education—as a result of Government cuts, so there is clearly a problem.

There has been a deafening silence from the Government in response to the alarm bells that have been rung by the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals and the Association of University Teachers. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to respond to those alarming concerns. Perhaps he will also say how Sir Ron Dearing's committee of inquiry will cater for the Scottish dimension.

When I read the press reports, it was reassuring to note that the Secretary of State for Scotland recognised that there was a Scottish dimension to higher education, but his comments had all the hallmarks of the committee of inquiry being set up and then someone realising that Scotland had to be fitted in somewhere and the Secretary of State running around at the last minute to see what he could cobble together.

The problems are now overlaid by the financial crisis in local government. When 40,000 people took to the streets of Edinburgh, they were not protesting against Edinburgh district council or the new Edinburgh unitary authority, as the Minister sought to claim in a BBC interview.

The photograph on the back page of last week's edition of *The Orcadian* shows the Orkney EIS banner in Princes street. I do not believe that teachers from Orkney were protesting against the policies of Edinburgh city council. *[Interruption.]* The Minister may have some doubts about that, but it is quite clear that the people of Scotland were speaking out. It was similar to the protest in England and Wales last year, which left the Conservative party in third place in terms of the number of elected councillors. I am sure that the Government are relieved that there are no local authority elections in Scotland this year.

The Minister and the Secretary of State talk about the additional local authority expenditure per head in Scotland compared with England and Wales, but that does not take into account the fact that there are substantially more schoolchildren in the Scottish local authority sector. It also prompts the question whether Ministers want higher standards to be maintained.

[Mr. Wallace]

Despite the crisis and the difficulties that we have discussed today, good-quality education continues to be delivered in Scottish schools. Of course there will be the odd bad teacher or even the odd bad school—although no one has named one—but there is no evidence that the poor teaching mentioned in reports on schools south of the border exists north of the border. League tables have their limitations, but they show that good-quality education is being delivered in Scotland. There is concern that standards might come under pressure through the funding cuts that are being forced on local authorities.

In conclusion, my party has made it clear that education must be our first priority. It is essential that we have a well-educated and well-trained young population to ensure our future competitiveness. We have stated that we would be prepared to spend the equivalent of 1p on income tax on education funding, and that if that had not been achieved in the United Kingdom, we would be prepared to support it in a Scottish Parliament.

The Minister points to a difference of view between the Labour party and ourselves, but we shall put our respective case to the Scottish people. The tax-raising powers of a Scottish Parliament are a matter of democracy. As the hon. Member for Angus, East said, the Scottish people have a firm and long-standing commitment to the education system. I am confident that, when we go to the Scottish people with our policies and our commitment to education, having been prepared to say how it will be funded, we will get a resounding vote from the people of Scotland.

10.29 am

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I shall be brief, because I realise that other hon. Members wish to speak. We will be interested to hear the response of the Minister with responsibility for education in Scotland. Hon. Members have made valuable points in this debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), as our parliamentary spokesperson on education, on having secured it.

I suspect that I am not the only hon. Member who has received a substantial amount of mail from constituents—I have also, in the past few weeks, met representatives in my surgery—about the prospects for our education system. I do not think that the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) really understands the financial crisis that is affecting our local councils, which are responsible for delivering this vital service. All hon. Members should share the concern that has been expressed in the past few weeks as our councils have been going through the process of setting their budgets.

Moray council, like other councils, has been asked to make substantial cuts in its service. In our case, for a population of about 70,000 people, we have been asked to cut £7.8 million. Despite everything that the Secretary of State told the Scottish Grand Committee in Kilmarnock, there has not been one iota of change for many councils, because the transfer of some of the money to which the hon. Member for Southport referred had already been made by many councils, including mine. No additional money will therefore be given to those councils.

The education budget for Moray council was faxed to me yesterday, at my request, by the newly appointed director of education. In a small area such as Moray, the required staff reduction will, I hope, result from voluntary severance. The reality is that we will lose 19 teaching posts and three to four of our specialist music instructors, who are a vital part of the Moray community. Other issues that have been highlighted are the loss of specialist language teaching and the reduction in special educational needs, which are front-line services that are vital to our education system.

In that context, I should like to put these questions to the Minister about education budgeting. The Secretary of State has claimed to have protected education in his financial statements. In Moray, we have kept above the grant-aided expenditure level, by only 0.5 per cent., yet we are facing cuts like every other authority, including the loss of those vital teaching posts. Any further cuts in education next year will have a very severe impact on front-line services, which will entail going below GAE, and schools will certainly be forced to opt out.

Is that the political agenda that has been set by Scottish Office Ministers? Are they determined to force our schools to opt out of our state education system, of which we are justifiably proud?

In the light of the cuts' impact, will the Secretary of State explain how the agenda and the timetable for new national developments can be fulfilled unless the Government deliver additional resources to our authorities? I should like to have very straight answers to those questions, and no obfuscation.

I should briefly like to examine higher education. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has already told us what the Association of University Teachers said about university funding, and I will therefore not rehearse that argument but only endorse it. Let us talk about funding our students in the further and higher education sector.

All hon. Members must be well aware of the difficulties that people of all ages who wish to enter further or higher education face in ensuring that they have a decent standard of living while undertaking their course. They do not want to be millionaires; they merely want to keep body and soul together. That is particularly true of mature students, many of whom are women, who want to enter the education system after their families have been raised.

I have written to the Scottish Office, time after time, about individual cases. The response has been, "Tell the person to go and look through the register of trusts. Find a sponsor." There is no evidence that Scottish Office Ministers believe that people should be entitled to reasonable funding during their education. Last month, I took up the issue of student funding, Student Loans Company funding and the fact that new financial institutions will be involved, with the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson). He said in his letter to me:

"The financial institutions will offer loans on terms which are at least as good as those currently offered by the SLC."

Anyone one who has talked to a student knows that the loans offered by the SLC are inappropriate to students' needs. He went on to say:

"It is true that the private lenders will be able to choose their customers, but there is no reason to believe that they will indulge in 'cherry-picking'."

I will say only that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and I suspect that there will be a great deal of cherry-picking by those private organisations.

My final point is about the prospect of the development of a university of the highlands and islands. I understand that meetings have taken place with Sir Graham Hills and with the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and that the director of the highlands and islands project has met representatives of colleges throughout the highlands and islands for preliminary discussions.

Will the Minister ensure that the results of those discussions are made public to all hon. Members who are very interested in the prospect of a university of the highlands and islands, which would create jobs, build on the expertise of our existing colleges and be a great boost to the area's economy?

10.36 am

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on his success in the raffle for this debate, and on his speech. I cannot say the same for the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks). It is a measure of the Government's attitude to education that the one Conservative Member who could be persuaded to attend throughout this debate and to speak in it has not done his homework. I counted at least three errors of fact about Scottish education before he was many minutes into his speech.

I should like to concentrate my remarks on a few points about under-fives, because, a few weeks ago, when we had our debate on under-fives in Stirling, we were told that it would be quite appropriate to use village halls to accommodate under-fives. Why should young children be the only people in society who are so disregarded that they are expected to make do with accommodation in which everything is locked away at night, and which has no outdoor play space? That illustrates the Government's attitude to the education of ordinary people.

Once again, we have been told that local government schools are having great difficulties because of their incompetence and squandering of money. Only this morning, we heard about the Ministry of Defence losing or having had stolen millions of pounds' worth of pictures. I wonder if the hon. Member for Southport—who, I believe, went to Sandhurst—will join me in telling the MOD that it will get more money when it finds those pictures.

I was recently a member of the Committee that debated the Education (Student Loans) Bill, and the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), told us—believe it or not—that students are not poor, that the citizens advice bureaux' survey of students in Scotland was profoundly in error because students were not poor, and that they could not be poor because he had met them in student beer bars. That was the level of his interest in and knowledge of students in further and higher education.

I once again want to pursue the issue of proper funding for students in further and higher education. We must have a system that ensures that students are not deterred from entering further and higher education on financial grounds—they are clearly being deterred at present. They are, in fact, leaving further and higher education in numbers that the Minister would not admit. He simply refuses to recognise that any student would leave education on the grounds of not being able to carry on financially, yet all hon. Members know from constituency experience that that happens.

I have only a few minutes left, but I want to ask the Under-Secretary about the student loans scheme. It has been deferred for a year because the Government could not get the banks to co-operate on the time scale at first envisaged. Is it not the case that not one bank in Scotland was willing to join the scheme, because they all expected it to be highly unpopular with students, many of whom will enter highly paid jobs and possibly be useful customers? How many Scottish banks offered to join the scheme? If any did so, will the Minister give us their names?

10.39 am

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on securing this debate on an extremely topical subject. The Labour party recognises the very real concern about Scottish education, which led to 40,000 people taking to the streets in Edinburgh a couple of weeks ago. Only one sneering voice was raised against that demonstration—that of the Minister responsible for education in Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson).

I shall take up some of the points made by the hon. Member for Angus, East and agree with almost everything that he said. There have now been five years of Government attacks on Scottish education. We have to contend not only with spending cuts but with the impact of local government reorganisation. We now see coming to fruition everything that my hon. Friends predicted during the Committee stage of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. The Government were warned by parents, teachers, the Churches and others of the chaos that would be brought to Scottish local government as a consequence of their untimely and ill-thought-out reorganisation.

It is significant that only one Conservative Member has spoken today—the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks). I pay tribute to a distinguished war pensioner for having the nerve to confront the anger felt by Scottish Members about what is happening to Scottish education. It is disgraceful that the crib notes provided by his party misled him so badly. He said, for example, that there was universal support for nursery vouchers. Clearly the Government Whips failed to inform him that 84 per cent. of the people consulted about the scheme opposed it.

A number of hon. Members have spoken about pre-five education, and it is apposite that we should discuss it this week. On Monday, under the cover of moving from crisis to chaos in local government, the Secretary of State for Scotland again told us that the views of the Scottish people were to be ignored on the subject of nursery vouchers. He said that the pilot schemes, which any sane and rational person would have regarded as an opportunity to see whether the project would work, were not to go ahead. We have been told that nursery vouchers will be introduced, no matter what. That figures, with a Government who have consistently failed to listen.

The Government have been told by representatives of parents and teachers that nursery vouchers were not wanted in Scotland and that £1,100 was too little to guarantee a nursery place. They were also told that playgroups were inadequately funded to fill the gap, and that they too were opposed to the scheme—but they did not listen. The Government, true to their ideology, are hellbent on attacking Scottish state-funded education.

Is it not ironic that, as we gathered in the House last Wednesday to discuss the local government settlement and cuts, the Minister responsible for education issued a statement saying that the assisted places scheme was to be increased? That scheme is a direct subsidy to private schools, but funding for children at state schools is being attacked. That is absolutely disgraceful.

[Mrs. Helen Liddell]

Nursery vouchers have been in circulation for two weeks in England, and the system has already descended into chaos. One third of eligible parents have not received their vouchers, because they did not know that, even if they had a child in nursery education, they had to apply for the vouchers. One needs to be a Philadelphia lawyer to understand the system.

First, the child benefit agency sends out a form which parents have to send to a private management consultancy—Capita Management Services—based in London. The company sends details to Her Majesty's Stationery Office, which sends a printed voucher to the school, which then sends the voucher to the local education authority, which in turn sends it back to Capita. Capita sends it to the relevant Government Department, which sends the money to Capita, which sends the money to the local authority, which then sends it to the school. All that costs £290.

Head teachers in Edinburgh told me last Friday that their schools face cuts of £150 for every pupil, yet the Government can waste £290 on administration by a private management company which will destroy the structure of education for the pre-fives in Scotland.

Even more important, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) referred to the Scottish Grand Committee in Stirling, as did the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). In that Committee, we stressed to the Secretary of State the need for professional pre-five education. We were told that there was to be a light-touch inspection approach. That is another sign of the downgrading of education. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland referred to the Secretary of State's relaxed attitude to providing teachers for nursery education.

I issue a challenge to the Minister responsible for education in Scotland, and hope that he will respond without his usual bluster. Schools in Scotland confront a serious problem because of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. It is well known that a number of after-school schemes operate in Scotland to care for children after school hours and in the summer holidays. At the moment, a regulatory system is in operation to vet those people who look after the children. Because of a deregulation order on which there will be no vote, such vetting is to end.

Will the Minister guarantee that he will ensure that the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 will be amended by way of a statutory instrument, so that children who could be extremely vulnerable will be protected? Otherwise, there will be a paedophiles charter in Scotland, and people who look after our most vulnerable children will not be vetted in any way. The Government say that they are ending the system because it involves unnecessary bureaucracy for private sector providers. I ask the Minister, who is a sensible man, to tell us today that that deregulation will not be applied in this instance in Scotland.

In the remaining few minutes, I shall deal with the problems facing higher education. Within the next week, institutions of higher education in Scotland, which are centres of excellence, will learn how the funding measures will shake down and affect them. We in Scotland are conscious of the fact that our higher education system is respected throughout the world. Its funding had already been cut.

I suggest that the hon. Member for Southport should have checked his facts, because the capital cuts affecting higher education in England were already affecting Scotland last year. We have experienced cut after cut. We are no longer cutting into the fat of higher education, but into the muscle. I am delighted to see that the Minister responsible for industry in Scotland, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), is here, because our higher education is an important element of our ability to attract industrial inward investment.

Strathclyde university carried out significant research, which shows the multiplier affecting every higher education institution. Let me cite one example. One university, which employs 6,000 people, estimates that, through its multiplier, it employs a further 5,000 people in the community. If we damage the ability of higher education to operate properly, we limit its impact on the wider economy. That will affect not only people currently involved in higher education but future generations.

Those of us who have high ambitions for all Scotland's children want them to have the best possible opportunities in higher education, but the Government have let them down. We are rightly proud of our education system, but there have been successive attempts to anglicise and destroy it.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buffin—*[Laughter.]* I mean the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan; I apologise profusely to his constituents. He said that he had asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether nursery vouchers were to be the thin end of the wedge, and were to be introduced for primary and secondary education.

In July 1986, a certain Michael Forsyth, who described himself at that time as a former Westminster city councillor, contributed to a pamphlet called "Save Our Schools" by the No Turning Back group of Members of Parliament. Almost every proposal in that document, from opting out to vouchers, has been carried through. What is next? Are we to have vouchers for secondary education? Are we to have vouchers for primary education?

The Secretary of State for Scotland said in that document, which was written by him when he was proud of the fact that he was an ex-Westminster city councillor, that he believes that state schools should provide only the minimum education, and that parents should pay for the rest. Is that what the Under-Secretary—who has gone round Scotland to try to get schools to opt out, and who is so proud of the assisted places scheme—wants for the children of Scotland?

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): I am happy to have the opportunity to respond to the debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on securing it. I have listened with great interest to all the speeches, but I am disappointed that so many concentrated on resources in such a negative and misleading way.

Let me put the record straight. Resources allocated to school education have increased from less than £1 billion in 1979, when that crowd in the Labour party left office, to £2.5 billion now, a real terms increase of 15 per cent. So I will take no lectures from the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) and her party about funding of Scottish schools. Local authority spending per

pupil is 50 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1979, and 25 per cent. higher in Scotland than in England. However, as the House knows, we have taken careful note of the real concerns that have been expressed by many councils, parents and those in the service about the impact on education.

We are glad to note that councils share the priority that we consider needs to be given to education. Councils should have the maximum flexibility to do that. Hon. Members heard earlier this week the positive response of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to those concerns.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear to the Scottish Grand Committee in Kilmarnock that our wish is to give councils as much flexibility as possible in using their substantial resources to support front-line services, such as education.

The new arrangements that my right hon. Friend announced will give councils the scope to spend an extra £58 million on services, including education, and for the authority in the constituency of the hon. Member for Angus, East that will involve an increase of £1.25 million. My right hon. Friend announced a package worth £38 million to protect council tax payers. That package means that the overall increase in Government support for local government is £186 million, £64.5 million more than the formula consequences of the English settlement.

Mr. Welsh: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Robertson: I have only eight minutes left, and the hon. Gentleman had half an hour at the beginning of the debate.

I am therefore proud to make it clear to hon. Members that, despite a tough public expenditure round, we have treated local government very fairly and have given especial priority to education. We look to local government to reflect that priority, and we are confident that it will. However, we remain firm in our view that efficiency savings can be found across the entirety of local government services. There is scope in education for that as well.

For example, the Accounts Commission reported that there are 300,000 surplus places in Scottish schools, and that rationalisation might yield annual savings of £25 million. The Accounts Commission helpfully set out suggestions on how rationalisation might be approached. It is a sensitive and difficult issue, but it is important that education authorities develop strategies to deal with falling and changing school rolls. Twenty-five million pounds is a prize worth grasping. It can and will make a difference.

But I do not want to go over that ground again. Let us look forward to what can be achieved. The Government have taken a positive lead to encourage the delivery of an effective and relevant education for everyone who wants to benefit. I ask hon. Members to look again at the improvement in exam results. There has been a clear increase in the proportion of standard grade presentations resulting in credit awards. More of our young people are qualifying for higher education than ever before. There is more choice and more opportunity.

Improving standards are welcome and impressive, but we should not be complacent. There is room for improvement, and I wish to draw the House's attention to two especial concerns. The first is testing.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham *rose—*

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South) *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I am not giving way. I have five minutes to respond to a debate that lasted for an hour and a half. The hon. Member for Angus, East took up half an hour, and I am trying to respond to some of the points in the debate. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am tired of seated interventions, from wherever they come.

Mr. Robertson: National testing, as hon. Members have said, is an integral part of the five-to-14 development programme. Rates for testing in primary schools are encouraging, but the position in secondary schools is completely unacceptable.

I am surprised that the hon. Member for Angus, East, in talking about education, did not look at his education authority, which, in the last six months of last year, tested only 1 per cent. in maths in S1 and S2, 0 per cent. in reading and 0 per cent. in writing. I am therefore currently considering options for giving further impetus to testing in secondary schools, and I will report to the House later. The generally poor performance of secondary schools on testing must be—and will be—addressed if the wider benefits of the curriculum reforms are to be secured.

The new authorities will have an important role. They can grasp the opportunity to make real progress towards full implementation of five-to-14 and national testing in secondary schools, and to secure the benefits for the children involved. I have made it clear that we have a background of positive achievement, and the time is now right to move forward and to build.

I am certain that the vast majority of our schools do an excellent job, and children and parents are well served by them. But some schools are not achieving their full potential. That is the second area of concern that I wish to share with the House.

I do not just mean inner-city schools. Schools in other areas may not be getting the best out of their pupils, and are therefore letting them down. We should not brand those schools as failing, as some Opposition Members do, or think that teachers should be dismissed, as some Opposition Members do. We owe it to those schools, teachers, children and parents associated with them to help to find ways of raising performance.

I am therefore announcing today that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will set up a task force to address the issue of under-achievement. Its chairman and members will be announced in due course. The task force will identify strategies to achieve better teacher and pupil morale and the more effective use of resources in the education sector. It will build on the solid groundwork of achievement and rising standards that we have already laid. The specific remit of the task force is

"To advise the Secretary of State on strategies to improve performance in primary and secondary schools which are under-achieving with a view to improving pupil achievement generally and also to securing greater value for money for the resources committed to school education."

[Mr. Robertson]

The task force is a direct product of the work that we have already done in identifying performance measures for schools.

I am sure that it is necessary to look at under-achievement in its widest form. I do not want hon. Members to go away with the simple notion that under-achievement is about failure, either of pupils or of schools. Under-achievement implies that we are not meeting our full potential, and that can take many forms and there can be many reasons for it. There may be examples at all levels in the school system.

Among the fundamental issues that the task force will identify is the need to create positive attitudes to success, and eliminate the demoralising fear of failure from our approach to so many tasks. I am sure that there will be a role for everyone associated with the education system to help to take forward the products of the task force.

Many of the Government's initiatives in education and elsewhere have been directed towards giving people control—giving them a say. In education, we have led the way in recognising the rights and interests of parents—their rights to choose, their rights to better information, and their rights to participate. But not everybody sees it that way, least of all Opposition Members. From the cradle to the grave, they believe that big brother—in the form of central Government, the local authority or the education committee—always knows better than parents what is best for their children.

Sometimes, the Opposition's knee-jerk opposition degenerates into farce. Labour-controlled local authorities, which have been screaming blue murder over their budgets, have cavalierly turned down the extra money that was available for nursery vouchers. The hon. Member for Monklands, East, with no apparent sense of irony or of the absurdity of her remarks, asked me last November:

> "Have you no concern for the education and emotional development of the four-year-olds you intend using as political footballs?"

I have never yet heard of a four-year-old who has been traumatised for life because his parents were able to flourish a voucher for £1,100—buckshee—to be spent on his or her education. The hon. Lady published a document that stated, "Every child is special", and so it is—but not special enough to deserve an assisted place, to give him or her the same start in life that the Leader of the Opposition had; not special enough to have his or her academic ability tested with a view to improving attainment; not special enough to get free nursery education of his or her parents' choice; and not special enough to have mixed-ability teaching examined, to see if that is the right way forward.

The hon. Lady's meaningless document is another high-wire balancing act between the cosmetic modernisers in her party and the stone age old believers. It will impress no one—not even the Educational Institute of Scotland, which said that the document was empty-headed and showed a paucity of thought. Only this Government's policies for genuine devolution of power to schools and parents offer the agenda of choice and individuality that will equip our young people for life.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We must move on to the next debate.

Cyprus

11 am

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I make no apology for again bringing the tragedy of Cyprus before the House. Although the issues facing Cyprus have not changed since 1974, the hurt that ordinary Cypriots feel has grown deeper. Over the past 21 and a half years, many tens of thousands of Cypriots have been able to see their homes but unable to live in them. Homes that might have been in their families for generations may now be uninhabited or, worse, inhabited by squatters sent there from Turkey.

The green line that divides the great city of Nicosia provides a contrast between the closed, but once prosperous, shops in the north—from which their proprietors have fled—and the modern, successful stores in Greek-Cypriot Nicosia.

The tragedy of Cyprus is a human tragedy. It is a tragedy of individuals displaced, and of whole generations of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots who have known only Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The separation between the two communities is as cruel and effective as apartheid was in South Africa. Old friendships have died over the past 21 and a half years. Young Cypriots no longer mingle, Greek with Turk and Turk with Greek. No longer do they play together on the football field or drink coffee together in the cafes. The events of 1974 have led to an almost institutional division of that beautiful island, which has been treated cruelly by mankind.

It is necessary that the House should reiterate from time to time that the status quo in Cyprus is unacceptable and that Ministers and leading politicians throughout the world should remind the international community of that. It is wrong that Turkish and Greek Cypriots should mingle and be friends in London, Melbourne, Wood Green or Edmonton, but not in Nicosia or elsewhere in Cyprus.

There is in any debate about Cyprus a sense of déjà vu. Today's debates are similar to those of the late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. All that can be said is that the dramatis personae has changed. The fundamental problems remain the same. The island is divided when it should be united, and Nicosia is still divided when it should be a united city. However, those sentences fail to describe the dreadful suffering that some Cypriots have undergone. If a home has been in the family for generations, and if generation after generation of the family has lived in the same village, it is a cruel blow if, suddenly and by force of arms, one has to leave quickly knowing that it will not be possible to return for many years—as happened in 1974.

In 1979, I met a Greek Cypriot in Nicosia who told me that, before his father left northern Cyprus, he said, "We must take the title deeds to our house, so that we can claim it when we come back." That did not do the father much good—he has since died. Tens of thousands of Greek Cypriots have died but been unable to be buried in the villages that were their home for generations; others have been unable to live in the homes of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

It is difficult to imagine such a situation in this country because Britain has not been a divided island since the Romans built Hadrian's wall. The closest analogy is if the River Thames were a mythical green line and people

could not cross Westminster bridge or Lambeth bridge—if we could look across at County hall but could not go there, or look across at St. Thomas's hospital but not visit patients there. That is what it is like in Nicosia for the refugees from Famagusta. At night, they can see the lights on in their former homes, and they know that Turkish Cypriots are living in the properties in which their parents and grandparents once lived.

Some 500 Greek Cypriots live in an enclave in northern Cyprus, but it has gradually shrunk. They decided to remain in their homes, but they do so with great difficulty—there are restrictions on their movements, they may spend only a limited time in southern Cyprus, and there are restrictions on their activities in northern Cyprus.

There is justifiable anger across the world that there is a large number of Turkish troops and settlers in northern Cyprus. Since 1974, many Turkish Cypriots have left northern Cyprus to be replaced by settlers. Why are the troops there? If the people of northern Cyprus are happy and so rejoice in their good fortune, surely there is no need for troops. The ratio of troops to local population is greater in northern Cyprus than it ever was in Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles. That seems to indicate that the people of northern Cyprus are rather dissatisfied with their lot, and the people of the rest of Cyprus must wonder whether the troops are there to attack southern Cyprus one day.

One of the greatest tragedies since 1974 has been the uncertain fate of the missing people. Some husbands did not know what had happened to their wives, parents did not know what had happened to their children, and sisters did not know what had happened to their brothers. Many Cypriots have died since 1974 not knowing the fate of their loved ones. Last summer, I was in Trafalgar square with my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) and the hon. Members for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) and for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara). One touching aspect was that elderly people came to the demonstration with photographs of their loved ones as they had been in 1974, still not knowing what had happened to them.

We are now told by Mr. Denktash that 1,600 of those missing people were killed by Turkish troops in 1974. That bald announcement is not good enough. The relatives have a right to know how their loved ones were killed and where they are buried. They have the right to give their loved ones a proper funeral. We must be told who committed those atrocities and what will happen to them. Surely we have a right to know why the international community has been kept in ignorance for 21 and a half years about the fate of those people. It is a disgrace that, 21 and a half years later, anyone can say, "Yes, we killed them in 1974."

The Cypriot problem also has practical implications, because of the United Nations peacekeeping force. The United Nations is almost bankrupt due to the cost of peacekeeping and the fact that the United States is rather reluctant to pay its dues to it, but it is essential that the peacekeeping force stays in Cyprus as a means of averting bloodshed. Cyprus is one of the flashpoints between Greece and Turkey. Turkey is a valued member of NATO, and Greece, of course, is one of our valued partners in the European Union. We want to reduce the flashpoints between them. We want them to have a sense of amity rather than enmity.

Cyprus has wanted to be part of the European Union, to become closer to Europe, for a very long time. I remember from my visits in the 1970s that the Cypriots were saying, "We want to get closer to Europe. We are part of Europe. Our traditions and our heritage are European." The European Union has agreed to begin negotiations for Cyprus and Malta to join the European Union within six months of the end of the intergovernmental conference. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister would be happy for the IGC to disappear quickly from the earth, as indeed would some other of my hon. Friends. The current timetable is that the IGC will end in mid-1997. That means that negotiations on joining the European Union should begin towards the end of 1997.

Some argue that the negotiations should start only if the Cyprus problem has been solved, but that is quite wrong. If we were to adopt that approach, we would be giving the Turks and Turkish Cypriots a veto on decisions to be taken by the legitimate Government of Cyprus. The timing of the decision would no longer be in the hands of the European Union, of the recognised Government of Cyprus or of the people of Cyprus; it would instead be given to an illegal regime that is recognised by no member of the European Union.

Would it accelerate a solution to the problem of Cyprus to say to Turkey, "Cyprus cannot join the European Union unless and until you agree to a settlement"? Of course it would not, because securing the accession of Cyprus to the European Union is scarcely high on the list of objectives of the Turkish Foreign Ministry. At worst, Turkey is hostile, and at best it is indifferent. It would therefore be crass in the extreme to give the Turkish Government any means of preventing Cyprus from joining the European Union. We in the European Union must encourage Cyprus's application and make it clear that it will go ahead, whatever the political situation in Cyprus. In the longer term, we know that Turkey also wants to join the European Union. We must make it clear to Turkey that it cannot join unless the Cyprus problem has been solved. I believe that a necessary precondition of Turkey's successful application would be a solution to the problem.

The logjam in Cyprus has lasted for a very long time. That is why I welcome the fact that Mr. Richard Holbrooke, who managed to bring peace—perhaps only a fleeting peace—to the former Yugoslavia said that 1996 will be the year of Cyprus. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary is also committed to making progress on Cyprus. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will outline his thinking this morning. I know that the timing is complicated by the elections that are due to take place in northern Cyprus and in Cyprus in the middle of the year, but from June there will be a period during which we could hold successful negotiations before the presidential elections in southern Cyprus.

Cyprus is much like the problem of the middle east. There will be a successful conclusion only if we have a series of building blocks. When two communities have been apart for about 20 years, confidence will not suddenly be rebuilt overnight. That is why I am sad that the confidence-building measures proposed by the United Nations have so far failed to succeed. If we could get agreement on two issues—Varosha and the reopening of Nicosia international airport—in unison, we would be laying the foundations for future productive developments.

[Mr. John Marshall]

If Varosha were given back to its original owners, it would lead to a rebirth of tourism in northern Cyprus, to the rebuilding of hotels, the restoration of property rights and the rebirth of confidence. Where, in 1974, there were the best hotels in northern Cyprus, we now have the wrecks of buildings. What was once home to tens of thousands of tourists is now home to weeds and vermin.

Last summer, I was on holiday in Cyprus with my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton and the hon. Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and for Knowsley, South. We met former citizens of Famagusta and the mayor in exile of Famagusta, who were able to see their homes. At night, we could see the lights of Famagusta, but we could not see a light where Famagusta was. There was nothing. Total darkness reigned over that part of the island. The ghost town of Varosha should again become an inhabited city, which would help to bring confidence to Cyprus. During that meeting, the mayor in exile of Famagusta made it clear that the people yearned to return to Varosha and to their homes.

The confidence-building measures could be mutually beneficial. They would enable Greek Cypriots to regain assets and provide Turkish Cypriots with a boost to the economy of the north of the island and provide them with jobs. Most important, it would allow the fragile plant of confidence and mutual respect to grow again, and get rid of some of the enmity of the past 21 and a half years.

My message to the people of Cyprus is, "Never despair." Around the world in the past 15 years we have seen tremendous developments, none of which could have been forecast 15 years ago. No one would have forecast that the Berlin wall would disappear. How many people could have forecast the demise of communism? In the 1960s, Mr. Kruschev went around the world saying that communism would bury the west. In the 1990s, communism was buried by capitalism. Where communism once reigned, we now see democracy. Who would have believed in the 1980s that F. W. de Klerk or Nelson Mandela would be able to take part in the same democratic elections in South Africa and be part of the same democratic Government? Who would have believed 10 years ago that King Hussein would be willing and able to make peace with the state of Israel?

Those are some of the major international developments, all of which have taken place against the expectations of experts only a few years ago. The people of Cyprus must not despair. I have a final message for the leaders of both communities:

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

11.19 am

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on securing the debate on Cyprus. There have been a number of debates on Cyprus in recent months, but there cannot be too many on this important subject, which we must never forget.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the demonstration in Trafalgar square that he, other colleagues and I, attended last year to mark the 21st anniversary of the 1974 invasion. Sadly, if we are realistic, we may anticipate the 22nd anniversary in July this year.

As that date approaches, time is vital in the search for a solution. I shall not weary the House by repeating what was said by the hon. Member for Hendon, South, as many other hon. Members wish to speak. Let me say, however, that I agree entirely with what he said about the tragedy of Varosha, and the importance of finding a solution in the short term in order to establish confidence in the communities. I also agree with what he said about the tragedy of the 1,619 missing people—a tragedy that confronts us graphically whenever we attend demonstrations calling for a solution. I agree also with what he said about the tragedy of the refugees who have been unable to return to their homes for nearly 22 years.

As I have said, time is vital, for a reason that I do not think was mentioned by the hon. Member for Hendon, South. I refer to what is happening to the population in the occupied zone of northern Cyprus. Hon. Members will know of the Cuco report, produced for the Council of Europe, which demonstrated conclusively that there had been a massive programme of ethnic engineering in the occupied zone. It is possible that the immigrants who have been brought in from Turkey—the Epiki, as they are called—now outnumber the Turkish Cypriots who still live in northern Cyprus. Every day that passes separates the two communities more, and makes a solution more difficult. Those two communities will have to relearn the habit of living together peacefully, as the vast majority did before 1974.

Given the exigencies of time, however, I prefer not to look back, but to look forward optimistically. There are signs of movement everywhere in 1996, leading us to hope that it may prove to be the year of a solution to this tragic problem. President Clinton has appointed Richard Beattie as his special envoy, to devote urgent attention to the problem. Following his successful efforts to find a solution in Bosnia, Richard Holbrooke had planned to visit Cyprus, but was diverted by the crisis in the Aegean involving the island of Imia, when Greece and Turkey nearly went to war. That would have been a tragedy in itself, but at the same time the Turks landed about 40 fresh tanks at Famagusta, which gave us all cause for reflection and concern about the explosive possibilities that still exist in that part of the world.

The Irish Foreign Minister, Dick Spring, visited Cyprus and offered his empathy and experience to the search for a solution. On 19 January, the United Nations Secretary-General's special envoy, Gustave Feissel, proclaimed that there was no reason why progress should not be made quickly, and that the elements of a solution were well known. The hon. Member for Hendon, South alluded to those elements, not least when he mentioned the confidence-building measures that were the subject of the last round of talks.

The European Union is taking a renewed, reinvigorated interest in the problem. In connection with the progress of Cyprus towards full membership of the Union, Greece was supported by France and Germany in its proposal for the appointment of a European Union co-ordinator to monitor progress towards a solution. The United Kingdom Government opposed the idea, but I understand that that was because they feared that such a move might interfere with the initiatives taken by the United States Government. I gather that the United Kingdom has not ruled out the appointment of a co-ordinator; I shall be interested to hear the Minister's comments.

The new Italian presidency of the European Union has also taken a close interest in the problem. Susanna Agnelli, Italy's Foreign Minister, has said that the EU cannot just sit back and follow United States initiatives; the problem of Cyprus is a European responsibility. The Italian presidency has therefore appointed a representative to monitor developments in Cyprus—Italy's former permanent representative in the European Union, Federico di Roberto.

Lord Finsberg, who in the past has not been noted for his advocacy of a solution to the Cyprus problem other than one based on the status quo, went to northern Cyprus recently. He visited the enclaved people in the Karpas peninsula—another tragic group mentioned by the hon. Member for Hendon, South. He is quoted as saying:

"I didn't expect to find at the end of the 20th century people having to endure the sort of restrictions placed on their lives that I found."

It is said that

"He described as 'inhumane' the practice of banning visits from children over 16 years old to their parents and called the confiscation of Greek-Cypriot houses and property in the northern third of the island 'legalised theft'."

That constitutes a dramatic change of heart.

I was interested to read, on 27 February, an editorial entitled "Cypriot bitterness". According to *The Times*,

"The divided island looks infertile for the Dayton process".

I was gratified to see *The Times* taking an interest in the problem, even if belatedly, but some misapprehensions in the editorial should be corrected. It referred to the Cyprus Government as

"currently representing only the Greek side, although it is the only one to be recognised internationally".

That is half right, but half wrong. The Greek side is the only Government of Cyprus to be recognised internationally; the so-called republic of northern Cyprus is recognised only by Turkey. The editorial is wrong, however, to suggest that the Cyprus Government represent only the Greek side. They also represent the Turkish Cypriots. Hon. Members who fight for a solution always make it clear that they are supporting not just the interests of Greek Cypriots, but those of Turkish Cypriots and Cypriots of all other ethnic origins.

The Times was even more wrong in stating that there has been a

"clear lack of political will"

on both sides. In his report on the breakdown of the last round of negotiations, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said that the responsibility for the lack of progress lay clearly with Mr. Rauf Denktash, leader of the Turkish Cypriots, and with his intransigence over the years.

I question the suggestion of *The Times* that a Dayton procedure might be the appropriate way—although *The Times* is not optimistic about it—towards a solution of the Cyprus problem. The problem is complex and deeper-rooted than the Bosnia problem. I would be apprehensive about a quick fix through a Dayton process.

We can, however, be optimistic for these reasons. We can look forward to Cyprus's progress to full European Union membership. That is good news not just for Cyprus, but for Europe and the west. Cyprus is of enormous importance to the west. As it lies at the meeting point of three continents, it has geo-political importance—part of Cyprus's tragedy has been the importance of its geo-political location over thousands of years. Cyprus has been the bone over which stronger world powers have frequently fought throughout history.

Cyprus is important militarily, again because of its geographical location. That is why we have our bases there and why the Americans preserve their presence there. Economically, Cyprus has much to offer the EU, as distinct from feeding off it. Cyprus's growth, averaging 4 to 6 per cent. per year, continues to outperform that of most EU members. Cyprus's per capita income averages $12,000 per annum and is one of the highest in the EU. Cyprus's economy has much to offer Europe, much as Europe has much to offer Cyprus.

We should look forward with optimism and purpose to a solution. I suggest—I am sure that many hon. Members would welcome this—that we should immediately look to demilitarisation. I mentioned the 40 extra tanks that landed at Famagusta. That is alarming. There is common criticism of the excessive weight of arms on both sides on such a small island. The occupying force is out of all proportion to any strategic need to protect northern Cyprus's population. More than 37,000, I think, troops are occupying northern Cyprus with supporting light and heavy armaments, including tanks.

I accept that the Cyprus Government are also spending heavily on armaments relative to Cyprus's size, but what are they to do when faced with the armaments that they see across the border? We should consider closely President Clerides's generous offer for an approach to Cyprus's demilitarisation whereby the Cyprus Government would pay the costs of taking interested forces in Cyprus out and replacing them with neutral forces. As the hon. Member for Hendon, South rightly pointed out, the costs of policing Cyprus with neutral forces are enormous and a burden on the UN. We should grasp that generous offer.

We should turn our attention to the management of a solution because, in my bones, I believe that a solution is coming. The management of the solution will present problems. I agree with the hon. Member for Hendon, South that Varosha could be important in that. I frequently refer to Varosha as the test bed for demonstrating that a solution can work.

There will be tremendous problems of management. We should turn our attention to those and look forward to a future in Cyprus of prosperity for the whole island, where the two communities and the minority communities can live together in peaceful co-existence, as the majority did before 1974. Commonly, that is stated in the slogan:

"One island, one people, one Government"—

albeit a federal Government, the likely solution—

"one Cyprus."

I look forward to that.

With the permission of the House, I should like to quote a few lines of a Greek poem that I have often quoted in Cyprus and in this country. It sums up so much of Cyprus's importance to the Cypriots, to so many hon. Members and to humanity:

"αν σε ξεχάσω Κύπρος, θα λιγοστέψω . . . θα φτωχύνο σαν άνθρωπος θα μικρνω θα μαρανθώ".

My translation is:

"If I forget you Cyprus, I shall fail as a man, I shall be beggared, I shall be diminished, I shall wither."

11.36 am

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me. I should declare my interest in Cyprus. I was a paid-for visitor to the rallies at Morphou and Famagusta last summer. Sadly, they were held just outside those regions because they are occupied by Turkish troops. That is a graphic symbol of why hon. Members should take a close interest in what is going on in Cyprus. It is a blot on Europe and on the world that we allow an island to remain occupied and divided in such a way.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on securing yet another debate on Cyprus. It shows the interest that exists here and that we want to keep reminding the country, this Parliament and others around the world of the need to be positive about Cyprus.

Listening to the two speeches so far, I find it interesting that there is optimism. Despite what has happened in Cyprus, we remain optimistic that a solution is not only right but possible to achieve. That solution would be in the interests of all Cypriots—not just Greek Cypriots but Turkish and other Cypriots. Their prosperity and human rights are at stake and that is what we are discussing.

Britain has a particular interest in Cyprus. It is not just that we are the former colonial power—or one of a number of former colonial powers over the years—or that we have bases there that continue to be extremely useful to our defence needs, or that we have strong cultural links with Cyprus. Even a casual visitor to that lovely island must realise that people there drive on the same side of the road as us and that they speak English very well. Some businesses have joint branches in north London and in our constituencies in particular. Hon. Members speaking today are proud to represent many Cypriots who are London based, which is our gain, but Cyprus's loss in that Greek and Turkish Cypriots are not able to live at peace in their own homes there.

The reason why we have a moral duty to take a close interest in Cyprus is that, as Britain is a guarantor power, we have international obligations. Sadly, we have not always taken those as seriously as we should. The 1974 Turkish invasion remains a blot on British foreign policy. The Government of the time, a guarantor power, refused to join the other guarantor power in taking action against the Greek colonels, who had instituted a coup in the island and thrown out the legitimate president.

We had every right, indeed a moral duty, to be involved then. We did not act, and we have been fighting the consequences for the past 21 years. We in the House must recognise that fact, and it is right to return to it time and time again. I hope that we shall not be as weak-kneed again in the future, and will take our responsibilities seriously.

We left a legacy in Cyprus, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South has outlined in graphic detail the effect that it has had on Cypriots. There are refugees who cannot go back to their homes, and there is an army of occupation far larger than Turkey, as a guarantor power, could possibly argue that it needed to protect Turkish Cypriots, even if anyone seriously believed that such protection were needed. I fully accept that in 1974, with the Greek army there and a coup taking place, there was a need for international involvement in Cyprus, but I do not think that that justifies the presence of 30,000 or more troops and lots of heavy armaments on such a small island.

Today we have heard about the refugees, the occupation and the missing people. We have heard from Mr. Denktash the very late news—which, although interesting, is not surprising—that those people were killed in 1974 by Turkish Cypriot paramilitaries. Possibly that is what most people already knew in their hearts actually happened, but the committee in Cyprus investigating the missing people must consider with a little more urgency what happened to them and where the graves are.

The surviving relatives remain most concerned, and while there is even the slightest hope that the missing people may be alive, it is cruel not to allow their deaths to be finally underlined, so that proper remembrance services can be held. I hope that Mr. Denktash will carefully consider the implications of his words. Indeed, I hope that he is not too ill to do so, and will make a recovery from his heart attack, as I gather he is now doing in Turkey.

At the time of the invasion, and perhaps even before, what took place in Cyprus was ethnic cleansing. We have seen results of that continue in the Mediterranean area. None of us has anything to be proud of when we realise that we allowed that to happen.

There is another legacy of what happened in Cyprus—the actions of Turkey itself, which convey serious messages that we tend to forget. Yes, Turkey is important and we have to take account of it. It is a military ally of ours, and was extremely important to us during the cold war. It remains significant in the fight against the spread of fundamentalism in Islam. It cannot be in the interests of European civilisation to allow non-democratic fundamentalist terrorism to spread in our area, and Turkey stands as a bulwark against that. If it can continue to do so, that is something that we should all support with enthusiasm, and we must give Turkey all the help that we can.

Turkey's sheer presence is important in the region. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) talked about the geo-politics. Turkey is a large significant country with strong cultural links with Cyprus, but Cyprus is not and never has been part of Turkey. It was a Turkish colony until we took it over in the 19th century, when it became our colony. But Cyprus remains a separate country. When Turkey starts to say that it would like Cyprus to be part of Turkey, we should all fear for the consequences.

We do not want an expansionist Turkey in the region again. We have a duty to support that country as it is, but not as it, in its wilder fancies, may like to see itself, with an expanding empire. The United Kingdom and the European Union must stand firm against Turkey, while at the same time being supportive. I look at Cyprus and wonder what objectives Turkey can possibly have in carrying on as it does there. There can be only one conclusion: Turkey wants to dominate the island and still sees it as a part of its empire which, for cultural and other reasons, it would like to take back. We need to say that that is not acceptable.

The United Nations has made that plain, and in all its statements and successive motions, as well as in the activities of the Secretary-General, has underlined it time and time again; yet 21 years later we are in the same position as we were in 1974. There has been no significant progress, for the good reason that Turkish politicians and

some Turkish Cypriot leaders have not wanted there to be any progress. All the political good will, where there have been signs of progress, has come from the Greek Cypriot politicians and the Cyprus Government—but I hope that we shall now start to see a significant change.

I believe that the European Union offers the possibility that Cyprus could become united again, and have the guarantees of peace and freedom within their own country that all Cypriots want. Perhaps it was not appropriate for Greece, Turkey and Britain to be guarantor powers, but it would be appropriate, within the European Union, for the guarantees of freedom and justice to be offered by a wider international community. So I hope that we can make progress there.

I am grateful for the British Government's support for the UN. It has been noticeable that many of the initiatives have come about not only with Britain's tacit support but after a great deal of hard work by our Ministers and diplomats. One has only to observe the activities of the British high commissioner in Nicosia to appreciate what good work is done, and what confidence building between the two communities can be achieved by the positive actions of the British Government.

I hope that that will continue. We must do more than rely on the United Nations; we must work through the EU and use our own resources to promote justice within Cyprus rather than simply relying on what may be perceived as the foreign affairs interests of the United States.

We would probably all agree that nothing can be achieved in Cyprus unless the United States wants something to be achieved. After 21 and a half years, that may lead us to certain conclusions about the good will of American Administrations. I hope that there is now an opportunity for America to show a more positive attitude towards Cyprus, and a less sycophantic response to the military needs of Turkey. The United States elections are a jolly good time for candidates on both sides to make their positions clear, and I hope not only that they do that but that this time they carry out what they say after they have been elected.

We have talked about possible membership of the EU for Cyprus, with negotiations starting six months after the conclusion of the next intergovernmental conference—if it ever reaches any conclusions. I hope that we manage to get some sensible conclusions from the IGC, with which Conservative Members can agree. I see my hon. Friend the Minister of State laughing; he knows perfectly well what I would like to come out of the IGC. Immediately afterwards I would like to see Cyprus join the EU.

It is important for us to reaffirm the message that Cyprus will join, and that it should join as a federal state—one Cyprus, one sovereignty and one Government, albeit in a federal system with two parts. Turkey does not have the right to veto a political solution in Cyprus, and therefore veto its membership of the EU.

I have no illusions about how difficult it would be for the Government of Cyprus to enter the EU when one third of the island is still occupied, as that part could not functionally be part of the European Union. That would be incredibly difficult, but it must remain a possibility, if Turkey and Turkish Cypriots do not adopt a positive attitude and find a solution. I should like an affirmation from my hon. Friend today that that remains the bottom line, and could happen, however difficult it may be.

I also draw conclusions about Turkey over what has being going on in the Aegean. I am concerned that Turkey has sought to overturn a clear international agreement on the demarcation line between the Dodecanese islands and the Anatolian coast that was agreed in 1932. It was perfectly fairly agreed with Italy, transferred by Italy to Greece in 1947 and has been operated successfully ever since by Turkey and Greece. Turkey cannot use weasel words or find ways to slip out of it.

It is beholden on us to recognise that international agreement and the way in which it has been operating and say, "No, we will not be drawn into supporting Turkey in trying to widen an area of conflict." I suspect that Turkey is only trying to distract attention from its political problems at home. We should not become part of the dispute and I would like to hear the Government reaffirming their statement.

Like other hon. Members, I remain very positive about Cyprus despite everything that has happened over the past 20 or so years. It is possible to reach a successful conclusion. We need the good will of the Government and of the people of this country and Europe to do so. I hope that we all work together to achieve it.

11.50 am

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am extremely proud to declare as an interest that I have a very large Cypriot community in my constituency. I have visited Cyprus on a number of occasions as a paid guest of the Morphou district association and the Morphou council in exile.

I am very pleased that we have the opportunity to debate Cyprus once again. It is extremely appropriate to continue the debate because, as hon. Members know, Cyprus is important to us not only as a member of the Commonwealth but because of the unique role that we play as its guarantor power—a guarantee of Cyprus's integrity.

It is difficult to speak in this debate without feeling emotionally committed to Cyprus and the history of the past 21 years. I remember very clearly where I was when Cyprus was invaded in 1974. I was a student and can remember the shock waves and the feeling of outrage that the invasion caused. When we look back, we ought to feel outraged that an invasion was allowed to take place and that that occupation—that is the only word for it—is continuing in Cyprus.

To very many people in this country, Cyprus is a beautiful island to visit. It has built a very successful tourism industry and many people from Britain visit that lovely place. They probably go for a couple of weeks' holiday, have a lovely time on the beaches and, one hopes, also see the sights and visit the villages, where people can still receive traditional hospitality.

Before people go—or even during their visit if they stick to the beaches—few realise the tragedy of the divided island and its divided capital. In, for example, the commercial, bustling, modern city of Nicosia, they might suddenly come to the end of a road where they are met by a wall, and the fact that they are in the middle of a division will really hit them. Encountering that division, represented by a physical wall, is a great shock to many people.

One of the reasons why Cyprus is not so high on the international agenda is that the Cypriot community have been so successful in building their economy and

[Mrs. Barbara Roche]

absorbing their refugees. One does not see any refugee camps in Cyprus. Indeed, as a result, one can go to Cyprus and not fully appreciate what has happened. That is part of Cyprus's tragedy. Its problems are on the international list, but not as high on it as hon. Members want.

Hon. Members have graphically described how 40,000 Turkish troops—a foreign army—are occupying a country that is a member of the United Nations, a sovereign country, part of the Commonwealth, and for which we are a guarantor power. We have heard about the terrible plight of the enclaved people, the great majority of whom are elderly. Some, however, are extremely young and are harassed in their daily lives. We know that not only from people who are sympathetic to the Cypriot cause but from the United Nations.

There is also the tragedy of missing people, about which recent information is very welcome. Like other hon. Members, I have Cypriot constituents who do not know the fate of their relatives. I know that hon. Members have heard me say this before, but it is worth repeating. An elderly lady in my constituency does not know what has happened to her son. The only snippet of information that she has is a reference to his name on the BBC 9 o'clock news on the day the invasion occurred. Her son was a police officer—a young man serving his country and his community. One moment he was there, the next moment he disappeared out of sight. That lady is elderly and she deserves to know what has happened to her beloved son.

I referred earlier to visiting Cyprus. Sadly, I could not go to Morphou, although I could see it from a distance. The refugees may be absorbed in the new lives that they have created, but they can still see the villages and communities that they had so tragically to leave when they were invaded. Indeed, they can even smell their former orange groves while staging demonstrations.

Like other hon. Members, I remain optimistic, as we must. Cyprus's application to join the European Community is absolutely essential in resolving the problem. It is very important that the illegal regime of Mr. Denktash and the Turkish Government is not allowed a de facto veto on negotiations. I remain disturbed by the Prime Minister's comments on Cyprus's application. Cyprus fulfils the criteria of European Union membership in every possible way. It looks to Europe. Its successful, modern, vibrant economy is right for European Community membership. But Turkey and the illegal regime must not be allowed to have a veto on the accession.

A two-pronged strategy involving the EU and the United States is needed. Britain has a key role with respect to the United States because of our countries' special relationship, and we must work with the Americans and the EU to bring about a just solution. Britain could do much more with the Americans to make sure that the issue goes to the top of the international agenda.

I want to come back to the House to say that the situation in Cyprus has been resolved and that there is one Cyprus, and I want a debate in this very Chamber to celebrate the unification of Cyprus. I want Cyprus to take a proper part in the world and to display all the enthusiasm and energy that a united Cyprus could produce.

12 noon

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): During a debate on Cyprus last year, I explained that I was taking up the case of a particular missing person to whom reference has been made by hon. Members. I said that I would have a letter to Mr. Rauf Denktash translated into Turkish, and I did. I received a reply that asked for more information, and it may amuse the House to learn that the letter—which I took great difficulty to prepare—was treated by Mr. Denktash's office as though it were a standard letter. That office has obviously been bombarded by such letters over the years. I intend to continue my efforts and negotiations, and I am still in contact with Mr. Denktash's office. If there is a further debate on Cyprus this year, I shall give the House more information.

Those of us who are friends of Cyprus look now not to Mr. Denktash—whom we regard as a puppet—but to mainland Turkey. Greek Cypriots—indeed, all Cypriots—now see their future in the hands of mainland Turkey. Only when the 35,000 troops in northern Cyprus are withdrawn by the political will of Ankara shall we see a solution.

I hope that we shall hear from my hon. Friend the Minister that the British Government place a top priority on solving the problem, and they should focus their attention on two matters. First, no one should argue that the fact that the island is temporarily divided—it is only a temporary division—should be a barrier to EU membership for Cyprus. One thinks of the differences between Gibraltar and Spain, the residual claims of France to the channel islands, the well-known divisions in Belgium, the awful divisions in Germany, the divisions in Corsica and, of course, those in Northern Ireland. It seems as though there is almost a rule that a country needs division to be a part of the EU.

What would be a barrier to EU entry, however, is a failure to observe human rights, and that is the second point that I want the Government to focus on. For years, Europe told Franco that if Spain cleaned up its act, respected human rights and got rid of dictatorship, it could perhaps join the European Community. Democracy was introduced and human rights were respected in Spain thanks to the force of the EU. That is now also taking place in eastern Europe, and it could also happen in Cyprus.

I want to end my remarks here, because my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) has an important speech to make. I wanted to take part in the debate because Cyprus is so important, and I am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

12.4 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I want to make four points about Cyprus. First, the status quo is not acceptable. It is easy to say that the situation is stable because there has been only one death on the green line in 22 years. Nevertheless, it is precisely the opposite. The recent tension between Greece and Turkey in Imia, and the fact that Cyprus is heavily militarised—and hence potentially explosive—and occupies an important part of the eastern Mediterranean between the Islamic and western worlds mean that the island of Cyprus is extremely important. Having a green line across the island separating two communities whose resentments for one another fester the longer the division goes on is therefore not sustainable.

Secondly, the approach adopted in the past 22 years—the UN overseeing intercommunal talks—has plainly been a failure. If one is to solve the Cyprus problem, although

one must leave the individual communities to discuss the basic substance, the strategic overview must be internationalised, as it was in Bosnia. Had there not been an intervention by the international community in Bosnia, we would not have got a successful solution there.

Thirdly, any such solution must now involve demilitarisation. We shall never build confidence between the two communities while enormous armies are facing each other across the green line and if one community—the Turkish Cypriot community—is effectively being deprived of its Cypriot character by the gradual process of annexation. The Turkish Government are practising almost racial apartheid in the area, as more settlers come in and more Turkish Cypriots leave.

Fourthly, the new opportunities presented by the accession of Cyprus to the EU must be grasped. The benefits of that might include the possibility of encouraging moderate opinion in the north side of Cyprus to speak in favour of a solution. That moderate opinion has been unable to express itself effectively in the past few years. We must also try to exercise through the EU some leverage over Turkey, which has not been prepared to accept the association agreement that it signed in December as a means of promoting a more rational approach to unity in Cyprus from Mr. Denktash. Any continuation of that association agreement, any further integration of Turkey into the EU and any benefits that the EU might have for Turkey must be made conditional on Turkey exercising effective pressure on the Turkish Cypriots to come to the negotiating table. The Turkish Cypriots must accept the agreement of the late 1970s that they now seem to have gone against, as Mr. Denktash talks about the sovereignty of northern Cyprus being recognised as a pre-condition of talks. That is obviously totally wrong. I look forward to hearing what the Front-Bench spokesmen have to say.

12.8 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on bringing the issue to the House. The debate is crucial, as we must discharge a responsibility that in many respects rests here in Westminster with the Government. I must apologise to the House on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin), who has been detained in Europe on European business—the Minister is probably delighted to be so detained on some occasions, if not others—and is unable to join us for the debate this morning.

Every hon. Member has talked graphically of the personal stress caused by the division of the island of Cyprus. They are right to do so and all of us, either through constituency cases or, as in my case through personal contacts, can talk in exact terms about the personal loss, stress and bad memories that people will take with them for many years.

In his closing remarks, the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) summed up well the important points that result from those divisions. First, there is a real danger of allowing the dispute and division to become institutionalised and the status quo to become normality for Cyprus. That imposes a responsibility on all of us to ensure that we are always trying to find a peaceful solution to the problem. If we allow the status quo to become institutionalised, two further risks are involved.

First, there is a substantial differential between living standards in the Turkish and Greek parts of the island, which will widen. We all know and understand the reasons for it, but it is unhealthy to have people with such wide differences in living standards living just a few miles from one another. In his opening comments, the hon. Member for Hendon, South referred to per capita income of $12,000 per year. The figure for the Turkish-controlled part of Cyprus is never very accurate and is usually never available, but would not be anywhere near that. We therefore need to do something about the economic imbalance.

As several hon. Members said, we also need to do something about the fact that too much money is spent on arms and too many people are involved in what is potentially an armed conflict. We need to avoid that, to demilitarise and to de-escalate. By maintaining the status quo, we always run the risk of moving in the direction of such a conflict.

Everyone has referred to the 1,600 missing people. The hon. Member for Hendon, South was right to refer to Mr. Denktash's weekend announcement about them. It seemed remarkably cold and callous to make the announcement in that context and without giving the relatives any indication of what has happened to their loved ones or of where their bodies can be found. The statement did not seem likely to build up trust between the communities. I hope that at some stage soon, Mr. Denktash and his authority can use the opportunity to make the information readily available to the Cypriot community so that people know exactly what has happened to their relatives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) displayed a remarkable optimism in his speech. I welcome optimism—those of us who have been in Labour party politics for many years have that as an endearing characteristic and perhaps that optimism is desperately necessary in the context of Cyprus. My hon. Friend was right to point out that we need a twin-track approach to push the Cyprus peace process along. He was also right to say that the Americans have a crucial role to play. I welcome the fact that President Clinton, above all other American Presidents, has recognised that Cyprus is an important political issue and put it on the map. I hope that he will continue to do so throughout and beyond election year, if he is successful in gaining re-election.

Richard Holbrooke has become a key player and we need to look for a Dayton process, which is the way to make progress. I note that Holbrooke has talked of three important conditions. I agree with those, but would add a fourth. Holbrooke said, first, that the leaders must have the authority to negotiate. That means that we need strong leadership and leadership in which the communities have trust. Secondly, he said that there is a necessity to remain at the table indefinitely, until we reach a solution. Again, that is a question of commitment on the part of all those involved in the negotiations. Thirdly—something that is crucially important in the Cyprus context—we need to maintain confidentiality. Hitherto, there has been no great success in maintaining the confidentiality of the discussions.

I would add a fourth condition, which is that confidence building and demilitarisation, to which all hon. Members have referred, is of crucial importance. It is almost a pre-condition to getting the talks started. We need to build up trust between communities. Throughout the world,

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

wherever there are divisions between communities, whether on ethnic or religious grounds or a mixture of the two, the only way to make progress, flesh out and add spirit to the meat of such negotiations is through confidence-building measures in the various communities. That is an important part of the process. We wish the negotiations well. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South is right to be optimistic. We have to do all we can to push the process along.

The other track is that of the European Union, and it is important for the EU to continue to emphasise its role and for Britain to emphasise its unique role as regards Cyprus and the responsibilities of the EU. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in that respect. We can and should give a lead on the issue.

I wish Cyprus well in its application for EU membership and it seems to meet most of the economic criteria. I think that it is in danger of being one of the few countries that would meet the Maastricht criteria—that may well be a mixed blessing for its economy in the future. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) said that EU membership is essential to Cyprus. That may well be so, but it is not an alternative to a long-term peace solution; it is an addition to a long-term peace settlement. Logically, we must always bear in mind the fact that it is important to see EU membership as an addition. The Opposition would certainly not give Turkey the right to veto such membership.

I know that the Minister has some important comments to make. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green ended her speech by saying that she looks forward to the day when we can have a debate in which we can look forward, not back—a debate that allows us to celebrate the fact that Cyprus is again united and that the communities can live together. We can all sketch out constitutional models for the way in which that could occur, but the important thing about that day is that it would mean that this House of Commons—this Westminster, whatever Government are in office at that stage—had discharged its responsibilities towards the people of Cyprus. I look forward to that and I congratulate the hon. Member for Hendon, South on playing his part in that process.

12.17 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I must also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on his consistent good fortune in the ballot for Adjournment debates. The House has rightly debated Cyprus many times, often in debates under his sponsorship.

We have heard many excellent speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House—the wisdom that we have come to expect from my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn), the sharp clarity of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and concise common sense from my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth). I look forward to receiving a copy of the poem from the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara). I also welcome—this may seem unusual, but in this context I think that it is right—the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) if not to his baptism of fire, to his maiden speech on the subject. He showed great common sense.

As other hon. Members have had so much to say, I shall have to be extremely brisk. My remarks are still well meant for all that, however. As everyone has recognised, Britain has a special place in Cyprus and vice versa. The large Cypriot community is part of the landscape of British society and the island of Cyprus has a special place in the hearts of millions of British people. The history of our close ties does not need recounting here—I have recounted it on at least two previous occasions. The closeness between the two countries means that we shall always be centrally involved in work to end the divisions on the island. The presence and contribution of so many Cypriots in Britain mean that we feel the tragedy of division all the more acutely.

The House has heard of Mr. Denktash's sudden illness and will wish to join me in wishing him a full and speedy recovery. The leaders of both communities play a central role in the search for a settlement. The recognition question, of course, colours the nature of our contacts with each leader, but it is essential that we listen carefully to the concerns of both communities, as several hon. Members have said. We shall continue to maintain contact with both leaders.

At times, the job of bridge-builder in Cyprus would try the perseverance of Sisyphus. I am sure that the hon. Member for Knowsley, South could give us an appropriate classical quotation. The divisions have gone on too long. The world has seen progress in other seemingly intractable and long-running disputes, so why not in Cyprus? I understand the impatience of hon. Members for progress in Cyprus. Cypriots themselves are understandably anxious for new initiatives to break the deadlock. However, neither we, the UN, the EU nor any other outside body has the solution in its hands. Only the two communities can decide what is acceptable and what arrangements are likely to last. The rest of us cannot laze around under the "tree of idleness" depicted so memorably by Lawrence Durrell in "Bitter Lemons", but our role is to offer advice, objective counsel and imaginative encouragement, not to impose a blueprint.

There has been a tendency to forget or belittle the painstaking work of the UN to bring the sides together. Talk, perhaps understandably, has been more of the prospect of accession to the European Union. I shall come on to the role of the EU a little later, but it would be a mistake to allow the UN's work to fade into the background as it remains a key reference point for negotiators in both communities. I am struck, for instance, by how central the principles of the 1992 UN set of ideas are to any discussion on the island about the Cyprus problem. The Government firmly believe that the ideas explored in the UN-led negotiations over the years will remain the building blocks of a settlement.

The United Nations has been closely involved in the question of people missing following the tragedy of 1974. No discussion of Cyprus can ignore a question that is rightly a source of anguish to many Cypriots. I know from today's debate and many others that that subject concerns the House. We recognise that it has caused untold suffering over the years. It is in the interest of both sides that the issue should be resolved as soon as possible.

The best way to do that, as the hon. Member for Leeds, Central suggested, is through the UN committee on missing persons. It is encouraging that the committee has persuaded both communities to submit details of missing relatives. We must allow it to carry on its painstaking work, which we

repeatedly urge both sides to do their utmost to facilitate. We have noted Mr. Denktash's remarks in that context and the Government of course deplore the atrocities that have been committed in Cyprus. If he has any information, new or old, we trust that he will pass it to the UN committee on missing persons. We repeatedly urge both sides to do their utmost to facilitate the committee's work, as was noted by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central, by my hon. Friends the Members for Edmonton and for Hendon, South and by other hon. Members.

The UN's contribution to security in Cyprus through UNFICYP remains as important as ever. A walk through the buffer zone in Nicosia is enough, as has been said, to bring home the importance of UNFICYP's work. We can take some pride in the fact that Britain has been a major contributor to UNFICYP since its inception and that our contingent's present role in the sensitive Nicosia area is especially important. There is more to UNFICYP than security. Its humanitarian work has provided an important stimulus to both communities to improve the living conditions of the Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the north and the Turkish Cypriots living in the south.

There is still some way to go. We see no reason to maintain the remaining restrictions on the Greek Cypriot enclave in Karpas. We should also not forget that the 400 or so British soldiers who, together with their colleagues, make up UNFICYP play a crucial role in creating the conditions of peace and security in which a settlement can be pursued. I say this clearly because I want the point to be taken: they are emphatically not there to perpetuate the status quo.

On the last occasion that the House debated Cyprus, we discussed the confidence-building measures, to which several hon. Members referred. The talks led by the UN Secretary-General came close to agreement on the resettlement of Varosha and the re-opening of Nicosia international airport. Sadly, the CBMs were a missed opportunity. The reasons for their failure have been well documented, but it would be a shame if they sank irretrievably into mutual recrimination. We believe that the package of measures could still play a useful role in the work of overall settlement. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South made that point most persuasively and was reinforced by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South.

Another important staging post was the direct talks between President Clerides and Mr. Denktash in October 1994. The imaginative approach adopted by President Clerides brought new hope. Mr. Denktash helpfully reaffirmed his commitment to a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. Although those talks brought no concrete conclusions, they were a driving force for the confidential talks in London in May last year under the auspices of ourselves and the Americans. Their outcome was perhaps disappointing. The lesson from that experience is that nothing can be achieved in the full glare of publicity: privacy is vital to the success of such talks.

The task following the May talks was to ensure that the momentum was not lost. Our contacts with both communities sought to encourage a common perception of the sort of trade-offs needed to make real progress. Our high commissioner in Nicosia worked untiringly to maintain both communities' focus on the central issues. His efforts and those of his US colleague and UN deputy special representative, Gus Feissel, proved invaluable for the visit to Cyprus in December by the US presidential emissary, Dick Beattie, who worked on a short round of shuttle diplomacy across the green line with modest expectations.

We were all heartened when it became apparent that Mr. Denktash was prepared, in certain circumstances, to support EU membership for Cyprus within the terms of a political settlement. Mr. Denktash acknowledged that this was a U-turn. We were heartened, too, that both leaders were still prepared to explore the ideas advanced by President Clerides in the last direct talks in October 1994. It was, of course, disappointing that Mr. Beattie's efforts did not make more progress, but the fact that the leaders were addressing issues at the heart of the dispute and Mr. Denktash's response provide a more encouraging basis for progress than hitherto.

The European Union's role must be seen in perspective. The decision at the 6 March 1995 Foreign Affairs Council to open accession negotiations with Cyprus six months after the end of the intergovernmental conference was a milestone. It envisaged what we all want: Cyprus joining the EU on the basis of a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation.

Cypriots as a whole stand to gain significantly from EU membership. Both communities have a strong interest in finding an acceptable settlement, which we believe will bring EU accession within easy reach. That means hard work by both communities between now and the opening of accession negotiations. My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton expressed the accession issues rather well. Both sides are aware that accession in the absence of a settlement, although by no means impossible, would be a much more difficult process and that neither side can insist on accession proceeding entirely on its own terms. There can be no veto.

Real progress has been made in preparing Cyprus for accession, as many hon. Members have said. The EU-Cyprus Association Council has set out a pre-accession strategy and a structured dialogue, which is going well. On 6 March the Foreign Affairs Council mandated the Commission to develop contacts with the Turkish Cypriot community. It has a duty to discover and to examine the community's detailed concerns about European Union membership and to consider how they can be met. Commissioner Van den Broek has just returned from a visit to the island to take forward the mandate. It is essential that Turkish Cypriots hear an authoritative account of the benefits of membership and how their specific concerns can be met.

I do not want the House to think that the tensions in the Aegean have discouraged us from keeping up our efforts to pursue a settlement. There are always excuses to do nothing, but the House is not interested in excuses. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary takes a close personal interest in Cyprus. He believes, as I do, that Britain can and must use its special position to maximum effect. At the Foreign Secretary's request, the political director at the Foreign Office recently visited Cyprus and the region for talks with political leaders.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The time is up.

Driving Licences (Eyesight Tests)

12.30 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): This short debate is about the new regulations applying to eye tests for the drivers of heavy goods vehicles. I declare my interest at the outset: I am, and have been throughout my years of service in this place, a sponsored member of the Transport and General Workers Union. I have always been very proud of my trade union connections. I approached the Transport and General Workers Union on the subject—about which there is much public concern—as it has a great deal of experience and expertise to offer.

I am the first to agree that safety must be the paramount concern when issuing driving licences. However, I am perturbed that the new regulations could put some of our safest and most experienced drivers off the road. Many could lose their livelihoods and be forced to join the bulging dole queues, without receiving any compensation.

The problem began with European Union directive 91/439, which stipulates that commercial vehicle drivers cannot be given a new licence, or renew an old one, unless they pass a minimum sight test without the aid of glasses or contact lenses. The argument is that a driver must be able to drive safely if his glasses are knocked off while driving—although there is no evidence that that has ever caused an accident.

The hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) put down a series of rather interesting parliamentary questions on that subject, and received an answer from the Minister for Transport in London, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who will reply to the debate today. The questions, which were directed to the Department of Transport, were as follows:

"(1) how many road accidents have occurred in the last five years for which figures are available where one driver involved was driving a passenger service vehicle and required spectacles or contact lenses;

(2) how many road accidents have occurred in the last five years for which figures are available where one driver involved was driving a passenger service vehicle and was blind in one eye;

(3) how many road accidents have occurred in the last five years for which figures are available where one driver involved was driving a heavy goods vehicle and required spectacles or contact lenses;

(4) how many road accidents have occurred in the last five years for which figures are available where one driver involved was driving a heavy goods vehicle and was blind in one eye".

The hon. Gentleman received an omnibus reply to his four questions, which stated:

"This information is not available".—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1996; Vol. 273, c. 25.]

The Minister is on record as saying that he decided to introduce the new standards. However, in the light of that answer, it seems that he based that decision on pretty flimsy evidence. The new eyesight test rules have been copied directly from the EC directive on driving licences No. 91/439.

The other important change in the regulations is the removal, from 1 July 1996, of the so-called grandfather rights. They give drivers the right to continue to drive buses or lorries if their eyesight falls below any new, higher standards that may be introduced. Under existing regulations, drivers may drive such vehicles if they continue to meet the eyesight standards which applied when they obtained their licences, despite the introduction of higher standards subsequently.

The Government now believe that grandfather rights for eyesight standards pose sufficient risks to road safety and can no longer be accepted. I have said already that the Government's conclusions appear to be based on pretty flimsy evidence. What is even more remarkable is the European Commission's admission that Britain is the only country in Europe that intends to enforce the new tests for older, more experienced drivers. Every other country in the European Union plans to retain grandfather rights which allow existing holders of licences that were issued before 1983 to keep them and to continue working. British drivers will be put out of work as a result of the Government following that absurd European Union directive—which, incidentally, came about while in pursuit of a common driving licence which would operate throughout the European Community.

The Government tend to play down the number of jobs that could be lost as a result of the directive. That was evident in the reply that I received from the Leader of the House when I raised the subject during business questions on 22 February. He suggested:

"some press reports have given an exaggerated picture of the impact of the changes and have caused unnecessary alarm".—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. 515.]

The Minister has estimated, after minimal research—to put it politely—that up to 3,000 jobs could be lost. However, the Transport and General Workers Union and other trade unions have conducted their own surveys and they believe that the number will be much greater. They suggest that the job losses will be on-going, as drivers who are currently all right experience deterioration in their vision and lose their licences in due course.

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, under the new regulations, someone who acquires a passenger service vehicle or heavy goods vehicle licence at the age of 25, for example, will not be subject to the regulations until he reaches the age of 45? Within 12 months of reaching that age, he may need to wear glasses or contact lenses. That means that younger drivers could wear glasses or contact lenses and continue to work for some 19 years, while those aged more than 45 would lose their livelihoods.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is quite right: that illustrates the absurdity of the new directive. I shall give hon. Members some examples of the sorts of people who are likely to lose their jobs as a result of the directive. Mr. Jim Good is a chemical tanker driver from Southampton. He is a highly trained, highly experienced professional driver, with a perfect record and a clean licence. He is 51 years old and will apparently lose his licence in three years. Mr. Michael Kavanagh owns a small haulage firm in Huddersfield. He has only one eye and will be unable to afford to employ another driver in his place. His business is likely to fold.

My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) has brought to my attention the plight of one of his constituents: Mr. Alan Forester, of Jarrow, feels that he is in danger of losing his job as a result of these new regulations. Fred Morse, 50, of Bristol, has an excellent record but he will shortly lose his licence.

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): One of my constituents, who has a clean licence and an outstanding record—in fact, he has been recommended for safety awards—is likely to lose his job if the directive goes through unamended.

Mr. Hughes: That is yet another example of the type of people who will be affected. Mrs. Judith Pearman, of Buckinghamshire, wrote the following letter to her local newspaper:

"My husband Ken has been a heavy goods vehicle driver for 25 years but now seems likely to lose his job. Why? Redundancy? Sacked for theft or gross misconduct? No, none of these.

The European Union has decreed that all holders of LGV licences must pass an eye test, unaided, without glasses or contact lenses. Drivers who don't pass lose their licences and their livelihoods.

Is the Government concerned? No: Commons leader Tony Newton says it will affect only a small minority. Well, I've got news for him. One-third of my husband's colleagues wear glasses or contact lenses: that's 15 people about to join the ever-growing scrapheap of experienced workers. And I've even more startling news for bespectacled John Major: they used to be Tory voters.

Is this the Government's way of taking lorries off the road to ensure more goods are transported by Wisconsin Railway? . . . We mustn't let the road haulage industry be steam-rollered into submission like the late-lamented fishing industry. Watch out, left-handed people: you're next.

Judith Pearman

Hartwell, Bucks."

Another truck driver—who has proved to be one of the most skilled in the country—faces losing his livelihood after failing a mock-up version of the new eyesight text at his optician. Norwich-based Les Gaskins, a veteran with over 30 years' driving experience and a 1989 finalist in the driver of the year contest, has worn glasses all his life and will lose his licence because he is required to take part of the test without them. He says:

"With my glasses on I have good vision and my driving record shows that, but without them my optician says I will definitely fail. I am looking at losing 12 years' driving—nearly £250,000 in wages—and have less than a year left on my licence."

Mr. Gaskins says that if the Government class defective eyesight as a disability, the drivers affected should receive disability allowances.

On 31 January, Mr. Raymond Trotter, of Woodthorpe, York, North Yorkshire, wrote the following letter:

"I am writing to you about the new law concerning lorry drivers. I recently went for a medical, with my work's doctor, to renew my class 1 LGV licence. I was told that he could not pass me, because of a new directive from the DVLC.

This says that because I wear glasses, I have to be able to read the top letter on a wall chart from three meters, without my glasses. Even though I had been to the optician that morning, and had got a good enough reading on my eye test to pass the previous limit, my optician said that I was alright to carry on driving lorries. It was afterwards that my work's doctor showed me the new DVLC directive.

My optician was obviously not aware of this new directive, as were a few lorry drivers that I have spoken to since. I think this is something to do with if a driver breaks his glasses whilst driving. I can't think of any reason for anybody to be driving without his glasses if they need them to drive.

Yours sincerely,

R. Trotter."

Those are the sorts of people, from all over the country, who are likely to lose their jobs.

Why is Britain taking such a rigid line on this issue? I understand that no other country in Europe is to abolish the so-called grandfather rights, and the Commission is permitting them to follow that course. The Transport and General Workers Union is adamant that, given the lack of evidence to the contrary, the retention of the grandfather rights does not compromise health and safety. To some extent, the College of Optometrists backs up this point of view and says that it is difficult to understand the reason for a set standard of uncorrected vision.

The Government have made a mistake: it is a proverbial cock-up. I advise them of the old adage: when in a hole, stop digging. I urge the Minister to take a far more flexible line on this European Union directive. He would be wise to do so.

12.47 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) for initiating this debate, and I welcome the opportunity to present the facts about the changes to eyesight standards for lorry and bus drivers that come into effect in July. I am afraid that the facts and objectivity have been sadly lacking in media coverage of this matter in recent weeks, and in the hon. Gentleman's speech. I have read far too many newspaper reports that have completely misled their readers and grossly exaggerated the effects of the changes in the law by giving the impression—incidentally, an impression conveyed in some of the letters that the hon. Gentleman has just read—that most bus and lorry drivers who need to wear glasses for driving are to be forced off the road.

Some of those more highly coloured reports have even suggested that any driver who wears glasses will lose his licence. Inaccurate reporting is something that Governments have to get used to—but my main concern about some of the things that I have read is that too much unnecessary distress has been caused to large numbers of drivers and their families, most of whom have nothing to worry about.

Much of the press comment has written up the story as a Brussels bombshell, but the second driving licence directive was agreed by member states in 1991. It contains a number of measures designed to make life easier for motorists moving around Europe—for example, mutual recognition of driving licences—and generally to improve road safety. By and large, the measures represent a joining together of existing practice in member states.

To put the record straight on eyesight, the standards prescribed in the second directive are largely those that already apply in Britain. That is not surprising as we had a major input into them. The vast majority of bus and lorry drivers, including those who need to wear glasses or contact lenses for driving, will not be affected by them. The EC directive requires a minimum level of vision in both eyes with or without glasses. The United Kingdom already applies the identical standard. It requires a normal field of vision in both eyes, as does the United Kingdom. It requires that drivers must not suffer from double vision. That is already a requirement in the United Kingdom. Finally—this is where people seem to be getting somewhat carried away—it requires all drivers who need to wear glasses for driving to meet a minimum standard of vision without their glasses or contact lenses.

Let me make two points about that final requirement. First, we already require, and have done since 1983, a minimum standard of vision without glasses for bus and

[Mr. Steve Norris]

lorry drivers. There is absolutely nothing new in that. The only change is that the standard will have to be met in both eyes rather than in one.

Secondly, the standard itself has not changed and is not a tough standard, as some reports have suggested. It is equivalent to reading the top line on an optician's chart from a distance of 3 m. I hope that the House will reflect for a moment on what that means. There is a practical reason for that: it is designed to ensure that, in the event of glasses or contact lenses being dislodged in an emergency or collision, the driver has at least the minimum vision needed to bring his vehicle to a halt or to manoeuvre it to safety. It does not seem unreasonable to require a driver in that situation—however rarely it might occur—to be able to see other vehicles or pedestrians and take the necessary precautions. Having to hand a spare pair of glasses or contact lenses is not the answer in an emergency. Apart from that practical consideration, it is likely that a driver who could not pass the test without glasses would require lenses so thick that he or she would not have a normal field of vision when wearing glasses, and would fail the standard on that account.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Norris: I shall not give way now as I have a great deal to say to correct the dreadful misinformation that has been put about, but I shall give way later, if I have sufficient time.

The standards in the directive, which, as I have said, are very much in line with current United Kingdom standards, represent the consensus view of road safety and medical experts in the EU member states as to what minimum eyesight requirements are compatible with road safety for the drivers of large and potentially dangerous vehicles.

In the light of that expert advice, the Government had to take a decision as to whether the new standards should apply only to new drivers—those who apply for a licence after 1 July—or to current licence holders as well. That is known as the grandfather rights issue. It is complicated by the fact that in the United Kingdom we have for many years operated a system of grandfather rights that allows drivers who continue to meet the eyesight requirements that applied when they first obtained their licence to continue driving even if they cannot meet the more stringent requirements that were introduced subsequently. So, for example, a person with sight in only one eye is already barred from applying for a licence to drive buses or lorries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) has left the Chamber, but I shall reply to him in his absence. A 25-year-old would not be granted a licence that did not conform to the requirements of the second directive. We have been applying that new standard administratively for some years. I should tell the hon. Member for Newport, East, who unwisely agreed with my hon. Friend, that the youngest driver likely to be affected will be about 32 years old.

Let me make it clear that we still allow relatively few drivers with sight in only one eye to continue driving simply because it was allowed at the time they obtained their licences. The standards in the directive add another stricter requirement to the current standards, so people driving on grandfather rights will fall even further behind the requirements considered compatible with road safety.

In considering the position of existing drivers, we were only too aware that some of those who would not now be entitled to drive were it not for the grandfather rights provision might well have an accident-free driving record, and for some the loss of their licence could mean the loss of their jobs. On the other hand, continuing with the grandfather rights system would effectively permit licences to be renewed by a few individuals whose eyesight fell well below what had been agreed as the minimum safe standards. Our view was that the system of grandfather rights carried significant risks to road safety.

It is difficult to justify on any objective criteria allowing a minority of drivers to continue to hold licences if they cannot meet the same standards that apply to the majority. Therefore, we put those points for consideration in a public consultation paper. We consulted 95 bodies, including trade associations, employees' representative bodies and motoring organisations as well as medical and road safety interests. The views expressed in response to that letter were fairly evenly divided between those who thought that grandfather rights should continue and those who felt that they should be abolished. After carefully considering those views, I personally took a decision, which I announced last October, that road safety would not be best served if drivers of those vehicles were allowed to continue driving on the basis simply of licensing history rather than of any criteria relating to safety.

It was not an easy decision, but we are not here simply to make easy decisions. I have no doubt that, had we reached a different decision, many of those who are now critical of the changes that we are introducing would be the first to complain about inadequate safety and Government intransigence if, for example, a bus driver with eyesight below the new standard had an accident in which schoolchildren were killed or injured.

Our estimate is that some 3,000 drivers will lose their entitlement to drive lorries or buses as a result of the change in the law. That represents about 0.2 per cent. or one fifth of 1 per cent. of those currently licensed to drive lorries and buses—considerably lower than figures such as 25 per cent. or the one third quoted by Mrs. Pearman in the letter that the hon. Gentleman read out and that has been quoted in the press. I wrote to the *Daily Mail* to point out the reality, but it declined to print my letter.

The drivers concerned will retain their current entitlement until their licences come up for renewal, when they will have to take the medical examination required with all renewal applications. Only at that point will those who cannot meet the new standard lose their entitlement.

Sir Harold Walker (Doncaster, Central): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Norris: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman, who is a distinguished former Deputy Speaker. I hope that he will appreciate, however, that there are still a number of calumnies in the observations of the hon. Member for Newport, East and I should like to deal with them.

Sir Harold Walker: I would not question the importance that the Minister is placing on safety, but I wonder whether he will comment on the case of my constituent, who is a one-eyed lorry driver. As he was unemployed, he was encouraged to invest in a lorry which

he now owns himself. He will now be deprived of his livelihood and his savings that he invested in that lorry. Is there no possibility of compensation for people in those circumstances, such as was provided to the owners of fishing vessels?

Mr. Norris: No. I regret that there is no such compensation, but I should make it clear that I take such matters very seriously.

I have been concerned to take account of one particular issue. I can tell the House in quite unequivocal terms that no jobs have been lost in the sense that the reservoir of jobs available in Britain has been diminished. The Government occasionally agree to proposals that have the effect of reducing the number of jobs that are available, and no Minister would take such a decision lightly, but I stress that the availability of jobs has not been diminished by the measure.

Some drivers who fail the medical standards may be excluded from some jobs. I have genuine and great sympathy for the people to whom the hon. Member for Newport, East has referred, but I reiterate that in the difficult matter of having to judge the interests of safety against the livelihoods of a small number of individuals, I have taken a decision—I accept that it is not an easy one, but I am not here to make easy decisions. I listened to the evidence and read the 95 responses to the consultation paper, and I shall make them available to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes, so that he can see the arguments for himself.

Contrary to some misleading reports, most other EU member states simply have not yet reached a firm view on grandfather rights, although Austria is also abolishing grandfather rights. Press reports to the contrary are simply and unequivocally wrong.

I confirmed the Commission's view this morning with a Mr. Brisaer from DGVII. Its view is that any driver renewing a licence must comply with the requirements of the second directive, including the medical standards. The official even thought that there was an argument for making the new standards apply to all drivers immediately, but thought that might be too restrictive an interpretation. The official specifically denied that the Commission is prepared to

"view sympathetically any individual states wanting to keep current minimum standards"—

the claim attributed in the *Daily Mail* to Mr. Smolders of the international road transport union. It is simply not the case that we are being more communautaire than the Commission or applying standards in this country that are uniquely draconian to our drivers.

Let me reiterate the absolutely essential point: 0.2 per cent., or one fifth of 1 per cent., of those currently licensed to drive will be affected. In practice, what will happen in many cases is that those drivers will continue to drive for companies but will drive vehicles of under 7.5 tonnes, as they are perfectly entitled still to do. No doubt other drivers currently perhaps driving smaller vehicles will take their jobs and so on but, in the circumstances, I am clear that we have made the right decision.

I hope that I have been able to restore some sense of perspective after the quite hysterical reporting of the issue. I know the hon. Member for Newport, East very well—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

European Convention on Human Rights

1 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): There is a rising tide of anger in this country at the apparently increasing number of judgments from remote European courts that fly in the face of sound common sense. Increasingly, those judgments are defying the will of the House and are overriding law passed after due consideration here and voted on by elected representatives of the British people. We must deal with that dangerous phenomenon.

We must distinguish between the judgments of the European Court of Justice and those of the European Court of Human Rights. Only yesterday, a European judgment prescribed massive compensation payments to Spanish fishermen banned from fishing in British waters, and the compensation payments are to be at the expense of the British taxpayer. Not so long ago, there was a ludicrous judgment to the effect that the Ministry of Defence should compensate service women dismissed on becoming pregnant, despite the terms and conditions of service that they accepted before entering the armed forces. Both were judgments of the European Court of Justice. That court is a separate and major problem worthy of careful consideration, but that matter is not for today's debate.

This debate is concerned with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Let us consider some recent cases which highlight the problems and which have enraged a clear majority of the British population and, I am sure, of hon. Members.

First, in August last year, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled that the legal costs of bringing a case should be paid by the British Government to the relatives of the IRA terrorists who were killed during an operation that they were carrying out to place a bomb in Gibraltar. Let us remember that that bomb would have killed or maimed many service men and innocent bystanders.

Secondly, it was ruled last month that the Home Secretary, who is answerable to the House, may no longer determine how long juvenile murderers must stay in custody for the protection of the public and that such decisions should be passed to the Parole Board. That means that, however strongly people and Parliament feel about a particular case, there will be no redress through our democratic system.

Thirdly, as long ago as 1982, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that corporal punishment in schools infringed the rights of parents. Some schools attempted to devise a parental authorisation form, but the resultant inequities among children were such that corporal punishment in state schools was effectively abolished. That was done in response to a legal requirement, not as a result of mature reflection or of that sanction being replaced with one just as effective.

More than 10 years later, it can be argued that the current problems of indiscipline in our schools stem from that decision. We have expected our teachers to maintain an orderly school environment without the adequate sanctions to enforce it. It was a triumph of idealism, enforced by remote and irresponsible judges, over the popular will and, dare I say it, over common sense.

Only yesterday, a Ministry of Defence report was published showing that 80 per cent. of service men oppose the lifting of the ban on homosexuality in the armed

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services. Only 5 per cent. said that the ban should be lifted immediately. Common sense and popular opinion have spoken, yet four dismissed homosexuals are taking their case to the European Court of Human Rights. If they win, our courts, our procedures and the express wish of service men and of the House will be overruled yet again and taxpayers' money will be disbursed yet again.

There is a range of further cases in which law passed in the House has been overruled—I am thinking of anti-terrorist, contempt and blasphemy laws, among others.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The point is that the European Court of Human Rights may well have been set up for sensible reasons some 50 years ago. I am sure that my hon. Friend knows the circumstances in which it was established, but it has become increasingly political as a court. While I have no objection to British citizens taking matters to a final court when British legislation is ambiguous or when the administration of law in this country has not been satisfactory—as I fear is sometimes the case—it is unacceptable to hon. Members and our electorate that the definite will of Parliament, as expressed in legislation, should be overruled by a foreign court.

Mr. Arnold: That is precisely what is happening—the court is overruling the House. After such cases, Ministers have all too often come to the House to amend the law, not because it has proved right to do so after mature consideration and debate, but because we have to fall into line with the latest European Court ruling. Clearly, those are cases of judge-made law, not law made by representative democracy.

Why are we getting those increasingly bizarre judgments? I believe that it is because, as with so many of our European institutions, there has been a distortion of the original intentions of the founding fathers and because circumstances in Europe have changed out of all recognition in the past 45 years.

Let us consider the circumstances in 1950, when the convention on human rights was signed. Europe was recovering from the horrifying excesses of the Nazi regime and was only too aware of the fiendish actions of the Soviet regime with its gulags. Those tragic events coloured the views and actions of the politicians who were then responsible.

The late Duncan Sandys, then the right hon. Member for Streatham, told the House on 13 November 1950:

"The Government may, of course, say that human rights in this country are so safe in their hands that no outside protection is needed. We need not argue about that today. The fact remains there are certain countries in Western Europe with large Communist elements, which attach the greatest possible importance to the support which this Court can give them in certain circumstances."

Robert Boothby, the then hon. Member for Aberdeenshire, East, said in the same debate that

"the Communist tactic is a brilliantly devised technique of infiltration, treason and ultimate violence, and the destruction of the non-Communist world by the fomentation of disputes. Against this technique, which exploits all methods of democracy, there is only one answer—the Charter of Human Rights."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1950; Vol. 480, c. 1412-27.]

But, for all those concerns expressed at the time, the view of the House remained that human rights in this country, for which hon. Members have fought for centuries, were safeguarded. That fact was best summed up the following week by Sir Hartley Shawcross, the then Attorney-General, who said:

"I think we are entitled to say that the law of this country has always been in advance of the laws of most other countries in regard to human rights."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1950; Vol. 481, c. 16.]

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): It is important to remember that when the court was originally set up, it was aimed at citizens of countries which did not have the parliamentary institutions that we have, but which had the most reprehensible and horrible regimes, with no individual redress for the lack of human rights. In practice, the convention has been applied because we respond to international judgments and often add extra measures to them. The convention has been applied in countries that are responsive to their people, as this country is, and it has been misused to clobber us on various occasions when it was originally intended for regimes very unlike our own.

Mr. Arnold: Yes. That is especially so, because the convention was signed when Germany was just emerging from its terrible experience on human rights and when France was recovering from the Vichy period, which saw considerable infringements in human rights. Those countries are western and civilised countries in the long term.

Today, Europe is totally different. Totalitarianism has gone, be it in the fascist form of Franco in Spain or Salazar in Portugal, or of the communist variety in Poland or the then Czechoslovakia and all points east. Membership of the Council of Europe and the European Union is dependent on democracy and human rights credentials. All new entrants from central and eastern Europe that have thrown off the yoke of communism are subject to those tests.

We have developed non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International and a series of others, which investigate and publicise such matters and bring facts to the attention of sovereign national Parliaments. However, those very organisations are themselves part of the problem. If they fail to win cases in the British courts, they use the European Court of Human Rights process as a means to override British courts. They foster many appeals to the European Court of Human Rights with a classical British efficiency, frequently funded by legal aid.

Such organisations are increasingly working through the European courts, and operating on a narrow, legalistic approach rather than bringing their cases to this democratic House. They are further encouraged to do so because European Court decisions effectively overrule the House through the requirement to implement consequential legislation. The reverse is not true. The cost to the British taxpayer is immense. Not only is legal aid incurred, but the cost of the defence case has to be paid. In the two years from 1993 to 1995 alone, the cost was a direct expense of £300,000 of taxpayers' money.

What are we going to do? The mere words "human rights" are such that mention of change brings forth terrible accusations of fascism, and Governments fight shy. However, the cases that I have raised today are not examples of a defence of human rights. They are politically correct judgments by remote and technically irresponsible judges. The place for political judgments is here in the House of Commons, where judgments and decisions are made by elected representatives of the British people.

We should fire a warning shot over the bows of this juggernaut. We should take a leaf out of the book of United Nations agencies reform, and look at the example of UNESCO. That organisation became inefficient, arguably corrupt, and in many ways ineffectual. We withdrew from membership. I believe that we should deal with the European convention on human rights in the same manner. It has become an anachronism, with its terms drawn too widely, which have been defined in a manner ever more detached and bizarre by the judges.

We, the mother of Parliaments, should determine that the Government should exercise their rights under article 65 of the European convention on human rights and denounce our participation, which would come into effect six months later. We lost a magnificent opportunity recently, when the Government could have refused to ratify protocol 11 and could have refused to renew our adherence. They did not.

The fundamental question before the House of Commons is whether we intend to uphold our sovereign rights and our centuries-old responsibilities to defend the right of the individual, or whether we shall increasingly cede those sovereign rights to unelected bodies that make pseudo-judicial but nevertheless political decisions. It is time that we faced up to our responsibilities in the House and to the British people.

1.14 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue in the House today. The Government are, of course, aware of the concerns that he mentioned. I know that those concerns are widespread, and I shall deal with them a little later.

It is important to start by putting the entire issue into its full context. I wish to emphasise the clear importance that the convention has as an international instrument for the protection of human rights. I remind the House that, in 1950, Winston Churchill supported the court's establishment when he said:

"We have the Charter of Human Rights and we must have a European means of defending and enforcing it".

He argued that there had to be means whereby human rights abuses

"can be brought to the test of impartial justice."

That statement is as true today as it was then.

Winston Churchill saw the European movement, especially the parts that are now represented by the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights, as the central unifying elements in post-war Europe. The sentiment that he expressed is indeed true today. He went on to say:

"The Europe we seek to unite is all Europe; and in our Movement we must strive, by every means in our power, to help bring about conditions in which our fellow-European, now living in the satellite states of Russia, will be united with us."

Of course, it is one of the great changes in recent years that those states are no longer under Russia's yoke and can seek the way and the means to become free in a true sense and to justify their positions in a democratic community by guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of their peoples. I have to say that in some instances, as the House knows, that has not yet been fully achieved. We believe that the convention is an extremely important part of the continued pressure on those countries to seek to achieve that goal.

The convention is now the code of good behaviour for the wider Europe. That is not just rhetoric. The new democracies are using the convention as a benchmark for their legal and political systems and they are amending their laws and practices to bring them into line with its standards.

Mr. David Martin: On the subject of legal principles, the difference between our country and others is that—in our definition of impartial justice—the sovereign Parliament has always had the last word on any decisions in court. The way that the European Court of Human Rights operates denies our centuries-old tradition that in the end the sovereign Parliament has a say. That is part of our definition of impartial justice, to which Sir Winston Churchill referred.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I accept that our country has been streets ahead—of most of the countries to which I referred earlier—in the establishment of justice and in the way in which we have been accustomed to applying it. None the less, the fundamental underlying principles whereby liberty is guaranteed are universal and international. I do not believe that my hon. Friend would wish to see a situation in which the House denied the application of international standards of justice and individual liberty.

We insist that

"respect for human rights and democratic principles"

forms part of the European Union's trade and co-operation agreements with third countries. There is a clause to such effect in all treaty documents now issued by the EU under trading arrangements. The limitation of the convention is not as narrow as perhaps some of my hon. Friends might have thought. We are using it as a mechanism to spread the principle of the freedom of the individual and the underlying message of the convention beyond the European bounds. As such, the convention is a useful tool to try to establish both democracy and freedom across the entire globe.

Under the Dayton agreement on Bosnia, for example, the convention is applied there directly. The convention is thus serving an important practical purpose, in an attempt to restore freedom and liberty to that very troubled area of Europe. The convention is playing a critical part in the re-establishment there of the kind of freedoms that we are discussing today. That is the crux of the matter. I accept my hon. Friends' concerns, but this country was one of the convention's original signatories and the first to ratify in 1951. If we now denounced it, that would have a devastating effect on the chances of establishing the convention as a basis that other countries are prepared to adopt.

The convention's role as a bulwark to protect the rights of the individual and to provide the yardstick whereby democratic values were to be established and measured was clearly enunciated by Duncan Sandys in 1949, when the draft convention first saw the light of day. Where I differ from my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) is that I believe that that role applies today as it did originally, whereas my hon. Friend was suggesting that the world has changed so much that we should withdraw from it and change our views on the convention's underlying message. I cannot agree.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: My hon. Friend said that human rights standards are imposed in a number of European Union commercial arrangements, which is precisely my point. The convention, with its system of interfering courts, has become an anachronism. We should take steps to bring about reform. Even the founding father said that there was no problem with the human rights record of this country or with the powers and determination of the House to uphold the rights of British citizens.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is time to review the terms of the European Court of Human Rights. I shall return to that aspect later.

The United Kingdom is fully familiar with the rights guaranteed in the convention, which include freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and the right to a fair trial. The first protocol also safeguards the right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions and requires that the philosophical and religious convictions of parents must be respected in the choice of their children's education.

As a founder member of the convention, the UK signed up to two optional articles covering the right of individual petition and compulsory jurisdiction of the European Court in 1966. In the time that has elapsed since, a number of cases have been held against us. However, the relatively high number of applications from the UK and the relatively low number of complaints upheld is a healthy sign of the level of awareness of human rights issues in the UK and of the Government's record in fulfilling their international obligations—not things of which we should be remotely ashamed.

The vast majority of cases brought under the convention are rejected in early stages and never see the light of day. Of those that did reach the European Court, it found against the Government in 40 cases Countries such as France, Austria, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and Switzerland have much higher figures than the UK, considered either by head of population or by the length of time that we have accepted the right of individual petition compared with those countries' much shorter time scales.

Up to May last year, France and Italy—which recognised the right of individual petition only in 1981 and 1973 respectively—incurred in the case of France 30 violations before the European Court and 51 before the Committee of Ministers, and in the case of Italy 83 and 347. The number of decisions awaiting remedial action is 40 for France and 330 for Italy.

Our successes often receive no publicity, as is so often the case. The phrase, "The Government win again," is apparently not one to which it is easy to make our media pay attention. There have been many useful decisions. In the context of Northern Ireland, it was extremely helpful to have it confirmed by an independent tribunal that special emergency powers are in line with convention standards. That happened in the case of Margaret Murray, which involved holding a suspect for interrogation. The same happened in other cases, such as that of Kelly, which involved the shooting of a joyrider, and Brannigan, when the question arose of the validity of the UK's derogation from the convention. The court upheld the fairness of our system of planning appeals in the Bryan case, and the immunity from libel action of Department of Trade and Industry inspectors in the Al Fayed case. Most recently, the Commission has rejected several complaints from pit bull terrier owners about the provisions of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Where there are areas of contention, it is useful for the Government to have a non-UK arbiter acknowledging that this country is acting fully within the convention and reassuring world opinion.

Of course, I accept that there has been disquiet over some judgments, and that disquiet is fully shared by the Government. My hon. Friend mentioned several cases, so I shall not repeat the details. It is worth pointing out that we were particularly unhappy with last September's Gibraltar judgment on McCann, and we made that abundantly clear on several occasions in the House. It is worth bearing it in mind that the judgment was taken by only a narrow margin, and that the court found against the Government on one point only—the control and organisation of the operation. The court rejected the more significant claims that our law had breached the convention, that the inquest procedures were inadequate, that the killing of the three terrorists was premeditated, and that the action of the soldiers was in violation of the convention. In all those critical areas, the court found for us.

We should also remember that the court rejected the applicants' claim for compensation on the ground that the persons who were killed were terrorists intending to plant a bomb. The Government were left with the duty to pay costs, which we did in accordance with our practice of obeying international law. I repeat that we were not happy with that judgment. We were also profoundly unhappy with some other judgments, to which my hon. Friend referred.

My hon. Friend did not raise the question of parliamentary scrutiny in this debate, but he frequently does so. I am aware that some hon. Members have questioned why—given that the convention affects the British people so directly—Parliament was not consulted before the Government decided to renew the two optional articles in January. If we had done so, that would have been contrary to previous practice. We have never at any time since 1966 put the question of renewing the articles to the House—although we kept the House fully informed, as we have on this occasion.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: May I intervene on that point?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I have only three minutes left. I shall give way to my hon. Friend if there is time when I conclude my remarks.

The disquiet that we all share about some of the judgments of the Strasbourg court prompted the Government last year to review most carefully our continued adherence to the convention. There is a fundamental distinction between our dissatisfaction with certain judgments and our attitude to the European convention on human rights. The convention has our full support. We played a crucial role in drafting it, we continue to support it, and we believe that it remains an extremely important tool for ensuring that human rights are observed by the wide international community. However, we want changes—and I shall briefly outline them.

We want to ensure that judgments are not made against our national interests, while maintaining the defence of individual liberties within our society, and we want changes that ensure that the Strasbourg institutions take all relevant factors into account. To that end, we have in mind improvements in Strasbourg's fact-finding

procedures. We should like to sharpen the focus on the principal and relevant issues before the court. As a first step, we are proposing that the court considers introducing a new procedure under which it would make known its main areas of concern early enough for them to be addressed at hearings. If we had known the critical issue in the Gibraltar inquiry, we could have rebutted some of the facts on which the court based its judgment. That change would be a significant step forward in preventing the repetition of such an outcome.

We also want to ensure the quality of judges on the new permanent court that will be set up under protocol 11, probably in a couple of years' time. Good selection procedures for judges are important, and we want to start discussions soon in the Council of Europe, to see whether we can ensure that the court's judges are of the highest international calibre.

We shall argue for maintenance of the common standards of the European convention on human rights. At the same time, we shall seek wider and more consistent recognition of the need to respect different circumstances, traditions and laws and the ways in which standards are implemented in different countries. That, of course, will be extremely significant should the question of homosexuality in the armed forces arise. It is important that the standards of our approach to our military forces and the needs of the country are fully taken into account by the court when it reaches its conclusion. It is essential that these changes are in place before that occurs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

Concessionary Television Licences

1.30 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I wish to bring to the attention of the Minister and the House the St. Tydfil's court sheltered accommodation scheme in Merthyr Tydfil, in my constituency.

More than 40 pensioners resident in the scheme are currently denied the benefit of a concessionary television licence by the television licensing centre at Bristol. I argue that, first, the television licensing centre should reverse its decision and, secondly, that my constituency case reveals—as, indeed, do others—the anomalous and arbitrary nature of the regulations governing the concessionary scheme.

Since becoming involved in this constituency issue, I have been surprised at the shared experiences of a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House. I heard, for example, from my hon. Friends the Members for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) and for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), both of whom showed me papers from protracted battles with the television licensing centre at Bristol. Happily, the centre changed its mind and they won their cases.

More recently, my attention was drawn to a case in the constituency of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who, in the true tradition of the honourable nature of the House, helped me. I do not raise this matter in a party context. The information that the hon. Gentleman so kindly furnished me with has helped me to prepare my case, and I thank him sincerely for his patience and assistance.

I shall explain to the Minister the nature of St. Tydfil's court. It is a residential block of flats, with 10 floors, built in the 1940s. Progressively, it has become the home of pensioners. Realising that, Merthyr borough council sensitively and sensibly decided in 1990-91 to convert most of the block into proper sheltered accommodation and to provide a full-time warden resident in the block. Understandably, and following the example of all other sheltered accommodation schemes in the borough, the council and the tenants concerned had expected to qualify for the television licence concession. Indeed, the local authority advertised the concession when it issued tenancy agreements. It therefore came as a great surprise to the borough council, and caused considerable resentment among the tenants in the sheltered scheme, when the television licensing centre refused to grant the concessionary licences.

When the issue arose, I read the conditions—indeed, I re-read them in preparing for the debate—laid down in the regulations that govern the concessionary scheme. To qualify, sheltered accommodation should fulfil several conditions. First, it should be provided, or run, by the local authority or a housing association. The St. Tydfil's sheltered accommodation scheme is run and provided by Merthyr borough council. Secondly, it must be specially provided by way of erection or conversion for occupation only by retirement pensioners or disabled people. As I have explained, the borough council converted most of the block of flats into a proper sheltered accommodation scheme, so it qualifies under the second condition. Thirdly, the scheme must be served by a full-time or resident warden. At first, the BBC licence fee unit sought to deny the concession to my constituents on the ground of the absence of a warden,

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

but a full-time warden has been, and still is, resident in the block. St. Tydfil's court therefore qualifies under the third condition.

Fourthly, there must be a communal facility within the boundary intended to meet the needs of residents. There are such facilities at St. Tydfil's court. Those four conditions are fully met by the sheltered accommodation scheme at St. Tydfil's court. The pensioners of St. Tydfil's court are being denied the concessionary licence on a fifth ground, the condition which states that the accommodation

"must form part of a group of at least four dwellings within a common and exclusive boundary".

Since residents and the local authority raised this case with me, I have discovered that the words and phrases in the fifth condition have caused considerable confusion, created a number of anomalies and, in my opinion, led to arbitrary refusal to grant concessionary licences to pensioners who should qualify. The words have caused much confusion about who should qualify. It seems that the sole reason why residents at St. Tydfil's court are being denied the concessionary television licence is that, before the conversion of the block of flats, a number of residents purchased their flats under the right-to-buy scheme.

I should say straight away that the residents who bought their flats accept that they do not qualify under the present arrangements. They signed a petition and support representations made by their neighbours. They have shown traditional Merthyr neighbourly comradeship in supporting their neighbours' case. Indeed, the local campaign on behalf of the pensioners is remarkable because of the people who are involved, especially the redoubtable Mr. McNaughton. He has bombarded Ministers, the Prime Minister, officials at the television licensing centre in Bristol, and everybody within reach, to make the case on behalf of the residents and pensioners. That is all the more special because Mr. McNaughton is a registered blind person.

The Minister will understand the resentment that is felt that officials at the television licensing centre in Bristol have repeatedly refused our pleas. I am sad to report that they have also repeatedly refused to visit the complex. That failure to heed our pleas and to visit is resented all the more because it is clear that the fifth condition is open to interpretation and reinterpretation. I suspect that the Minister will know of cases, of which I am not aware, where there have been battles between pensioner groups, the television licensing centre and his Department.

I have already mentioned cases in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Vauxhall and for Mansfield, which, after protracted discussion, were successful. The most recent case that has been brought to my attention is one in the constituency of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire. He has kindly sent me the letter from the television licensing centre in Bristol, which eventually conceded the case that he made. In this case, it seems to be a mixed development. We are told, for example, that

"numbers 1 to 17 and 27 to 47 (odds) Homefield Close can be regarded as being within a common and exclusive boundary . . . From the site plan provided, it would appear that the warden can move freely between the two elements of the scheme via the car park which separates the scheme."

I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has succeeded in persuading the television centre that that case qualifies.

In the case of St Tydfil's court, the warden does not have to cross a car park; she is resident in the block. Pensioners who qualify are easily identifiable, because they pay into the scheme. It is a curious interpretation of "common and exclusive boundary" that rules out a concessionary scheme at St Tydfil's court for the simple reason that, before its conversion, a number of residents—rightly and understandably—purchased their properties under the right-to-buy scheme.

I plead with the television centre to reverse its decision and concede this case, as it has had to concede other cases. If it refuses to do so, however, we must concentrate on the fact that the regulations themselves deny pensioners in sheltered accommodation a concession that I think, in its heart of hearts, Parliament probably intended to allow them. I do not believe that the original intention was to exclude those in sheltered accommodation at St Tydfil's court.

Along with my hon. Friends who are present, I accept that many deserving pensioners will be deprived of the benefits of any concessionary scheme. Thousands who live alone in their own homes will not qualify. Once a scheme for those in sheltered accommodation has been proposed, however, we should ensure that it is simple: certainly, it should not create the anomalies and confusion that have been created by the "common and exclusive boundary" condition. A scheme for pensioners in sheltered accommodation served by a full-time warden would provide a clear definition of those who should qualify for the concession. I do not believe that any complications or anomalies would have been caused if only the first four conditions had provided the criteria, but the fifth condition will continue to cause such problems until it is changed. I do not think that a simple amendment or clarification of the regulations would bust the BBC or wreck the public sector borrowing requirement. The vast majority of properly organised sheltered accommodation schemes qualify.

I hope that the pensioners at St Tydfil's court will win their case. I ask the Minister to re-examine the concessionary scheme, and amend it. It was meant to offer comfort and assistance to pensioners in sheltered accommodation, rather than to cause resentment and bitterness. I hope that the Minister will heed our plea and accept our case.

1.43 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) on obtaining time for the debate, and thank him for his generosity in allowing me to speak for a couple of minutes.

The hon. Gentleman spoke at length about anomalies and interpretation. I have read the leading judgment on the subject—the Crown and Secretary of State for the Home Department ex parte Kirklees borough council. No doubt, the Minister is acquainted with it. Mr. Justice Taylor refers to interpretation throughout the judgment. As a lawyer, I believe that the law needs to be clarified, not only in the specific context of the people of Merthyr Tydfil—of whom the hon. Gentleman spoke so forcefully—but in a wider context. I am sure that many people in Wales, England and Scotland are in similar circumstances, and I, too, urge the Minister to reconsider.

Let me make two specific points. First, does the Minister think it fair that elderly people who are cared for at home by their relations do not qualify for the concessionary scheme, while those who are in registered homes do? Ultimately, the concession is allowed to the elderly person rather than anyone else. It is clear from the 1991 regulations—which I have read—that the matter could be resolved easily by means of an amendment of the kind suggested by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

Secondly, the residents of Ganllwyd and Abergeirw, near Dolgellau, do not receive terrestrial television transmissions; they rely on satellite television. However, they must pay the licence fee. Is it right for people to pay for a service that they do not receive? Good sense and common law suggest that it is not. Is that being investigated? There are dozens, if not hundreds, of similar localities throughout Wales, because it is a mountainous country.

1.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I congratulate the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) on securing the debate, and thank him for the courteous and persuasive way in which he put his case. I take what he has said very seriously, and, while I cede no principle or practice at this stage, I should be happy to speak to him about the matter. I should also be happy to speak to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). They may wish to talk to me, either together or separately. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) has an even tighter case: I believe that only one flat in 50 is owner-occupied in Severn house, but that prevents all the other people in the block from benefiting from the concessionary scheme.

I know that the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney has devoted considerable time to this subject over the years. He has campaigned long and hard in respect of the application for St Tydfil's court to be granted concessionary licence status, and this afternoon he has demonstrated that he is familiar with the general position as set out in the White Paper. He will also know that, since 1 April 1991, the BBC has been responsible for the administration of the television licensing system. That role is primarily exercised by way of its agents in Bristol, TV Licensing, and includes determining whether individual applications for concessionary licences can be granted. It would not be appropriate for the Government to intervene in individual cases, other than to say, "Come and explain why you think that the arrangements should be changed."

Nor is there any option for the BBC to exercise discretion in how the relevant regulations are interpreted. That would erode the framework of general application provided by those regulations and would lead to numerous disputes. Although the circumstances of St Tydfil's court remain a matter on which the BBC must reach judgment, I am sorry that, so far, it seems to the people who have considered the scheme that it fails to meet the qualifying criteria set out in the regulations—the point on which the hon. Gentleman has sought to persuade me otherwise.

The House is familiar with problems raised by constituents who, understandably, do not always understand the reasons for the concessionary scheme existing in its present form. The scheme is of particular concern, because it directly affects some of the more elderly members of society and disabled people. It is right therefore that the scheme should be kept under close scrutiny. The Government have done that and, although there has been no significant change since the last full, detailed review in 1988, it would be wrong to assume that we are not aware of the hard cases and anomalous positions that can and do arise.

That is an inevitable consequence with any position in which lines must be drawn, but it does not mean that the scheme as a whole is unfair, nor that it necessarily needs to be changed. It has been kept under close review and, while we accept that it does not always yield results that make everybody content, we find little advantage at the moment in conducting a further review of the scheme.

It may assist hon. Members if I give a little background about the introduction and development of the concessionary scheme. Its modern history may be familiar to some, but, oddly, the scheme originated by default more than 40 years ago as individual postmasters took it upon themselves to waive the requirement for certain old people living in old people's homes to pay a radio or television licence fee.

Later, Post Office headquarters stopped granting further concessions, thus creating an arbitrary distinction between individual cases. In 1966, the Postmaster General considered ending the concession altogether, but decided that that would be unjust, and offered the concession to all old people's homes. Importantly, at that stage, sheltered housing schemes for pensioners, with some communal facility that rendered them comparable to old people's homes, were included in the scheme.

In 1968, the plans for the concessionary scheme were put on to a formal footing and the first set of regulations laid. Incidentally, in that year, a separate colour television licence was introduced, making the possibility of a concessionary fee that much more attractive. The opportunity was taken to clarify the qualifying conditions, and further consideration was given to the precise definition of sheltered housing, which is crucial to any discussion of the scheme.

In subsequent years, external pressure for further reviews was exerted. All sorts of possibilities were given serious consideration—extending the scheme, introducing some discretion or abolishing it—but in no case did the Government in power at the time consider that the proposed solution would have enabled the concessionary television licence scheme to be operated more fairly, while remaining true to its original intentions. The proposals would have been too complex to administer, too expensive or simply unacceptable.

Nevertheless, as all hon. Members know, there is pressure even now for pensioners to be given a general concession against the cost of the full television licence, but often it is not realised that concessionary £5 licences for all the 7.75 million pensioner households would cost more than £500 million in lost licence fee revenue.

Mr. Rowlands: I never made that case.

Mr. Sproat: I understand, but it is important for hon. Members and the outside world to realise the context in which this matter is set. If time allows, I shall return to the application of my comments to St. Tydfil's court.

[Mr. Sproat]

Of course, the Government recognise television's important role for people of pensionable age, but we do not believe that a general concession could be justified. That would necessitate an unacceptably large increase in the fee for everyone else, possibly raising it to almost £130 each year, and many of the people who would have to pay such a huge increase in their licence fee might be worse off financially than many pensioners. If the fee were not adjusted, the BBC believes that its capacity to fulfil its public service broadcasting remit would be severely threatened.

In the past 20 years, the only significant changes have been connected with the qualifying criteria for sheltered housing, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Those changes sought to retain an equitable approach, although remaining true to the scheme's original intentions. The Government believe that that is still the correct view to take.

In 1982, physically disabled and mentally disordered people, living in comparable accommodation to that already covered by the scheme, were brought within the scheme's scope. That was on the ground that it would be an unacceptable anomaly to treat them differently from pensioners occupying similar accommodation, and there has been no dispute in that respect.

Towards the end of 1984, Kirklees metropolitan borough council applied for concessionary licences for some of its residents in accommodation served by housing stewards, whose duties included rent collection, care of the housing stock and provision of advice and assistance to residents. The Home Office refused to grant the claim on the ground that that was not a valid interpretation of the "common facility" required by the regulations, but in 1987 the council won the case at judicial review. That had far-reaching and unacceptable implications.

In effect, that judgment opened the way for local authorities to bring many eligible categories of people living in ordinary council housing into the concessionary scheme. They would simply need to claim that these were "groups" of "specially provided" housing. The housing would not even have had to be sheltered, which would have been contrary to the concessionary scheme's intention and extremely costly.

Mr. Rowlands: That is not true in the case of St. Tydfil's court.

Mr. Sproat: I am trying to put the matter in its context, which is important to understand. People who do not have concessionary licences and who live close to people who do often do not understand why. It is important that they know that there is a logic behind the position. As I said, the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to discuss the matter. A debate of this length is not the happiest way in which to discuss such an important matter and the detail that it requires.

Following the Kirklees case, the Government promptly conducted a major review of the scheme. Possible options were considered, but, once again, it would have been too expensive to extend the scheme. In contrast, it was deemed unfair to the many existing beneficiaries—I believe that there were more than 700,000 at that time—to take away a long-standing concession. The Government therefore decided to restore the scheme's underlying intention, so that it would benefit retirement pensioners and disabled people living in residential homes or in sheltered housing that was directly comparable with such homes.

Eligibility for the concession was thus still linked to the type of accommodation occupied, as opposed to individual circumstances. In 1988, we introduced new regulations to define the qualifying criteria for sheltered housing schemes more rigorously. Those include all the criteria that apply today. First, in line with the established principles of the scheme and the need to be comparable with old people's homes, sheltered housing still has to be specially provided for retirement pensioners or disabled people and to be run by a local authority or housing association.

Secondly, such housing must form part of a group of at least four dwellings, which must lie within a common and exclusive boundary. If not, there would be no way of limiting the geographical spread of a so-called scheme and the Kirklees threat would still be a possibility. Lastly, the scheme must be served by a full-time or resident warden. That also relates to the desire to restrict the eligibility of sheltered housing to the sort of scheme that is directly comparable with an old people's home. A further requirement, for a communal facility for the residents within the boundary, has since been dropped as, in practice, it proved unnecessary in the context of the more tightly defined qualifying criteria.

I should like to return to the specific points on St. Tydfil's court that the hon. Gentleman properly raised. As I said, it would be inappropriate for me to make judgments in the BBC's place about applications from individual sheltered housing schemes. I am informed, however, that nine of the 66 dwellings in the block are privately owned, having been purchased under right-to-buy provisions. Thus, they cannot logically form part of the sheltered housing scheme. A "warden" works there for the requisite 30 hours each week, but it appears that St. Tydfil's court does not satisfy the common and exclusive boundary criterion set out in the regulations. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy said that, as a lawyer, he did not agree with that interpretation, but that is the current interpretation.

Legal advice on similar cases has been that it is not even possible to draw an artificial boundary so that part of such a scheme can qualify. That is the problem with laying down rules—there are always decisions to be made in what might most appropriately be called borderline cases. The alternative, however, would be either to give the BBC the power to operate a discretionary system, which would surely be even more unfair, or to relax the qualifying criteria.

As I have pointed out, any extension of the scheme would reduce the licence fee revenue necessary for the BBC to continue to provide the quality and range of its services. We are thus left with the option of retaining a scheme which costs some £50 million each year in lost licence fee revenue and more to run, but which benefits about 600,000 people in line with the spirit of the original concession.

It would be unfair to draw to a close without discussing so-called preserved rights. The change in qualifying criteria that followed the Kirklees decision would have meant that many of those qualifying under the old rules would no longer have continued to do so under the new ones. Just as the Government did not wish to abolish the

scheme, nor did we want to take the concession away from anyone who had previously held it. The new regulations therefore included a provision to preserve the rights of existing beneficiaries for their lifetime, as long as they continued to reside in accommodation that would have met the old qualifying criteria.

That, I recognise, is a source of much confusion. It leads to positions where neighbours are treated differently due to past and not present circumstances. That is by no means ideal, but it is not logical simply to claim equal treatment with one's neighbour, even if one's first impression is, perhaps understandably, that the position is not fair. That is an inevitable consequence of the saving provision in the regulations and the Government's determination not to take the concession away from anyone who already had it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

1. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the negotiations for the accession of Cyprus to the EU. [17257]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The accession negotiations will start six months after the conclusion of the intergovernmental conference and take account of its results.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with the United States Administration's view that 1996 should be the year of Cyprus? Does he further agree that Cyprus's merits, both economic and otherwise, in making the application, should be viewed entirely in isolation and that, therefore, no third party, least of all the Turkish Government or the Turkish Cypriot regime in the north of the island, should have any right of veto over the process?

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that the application by the Republic of Cyprus for accession to the European Union should, as my hon. Friend said, be considered on its merits, and that no third party should have a veto. It is of course unavoidable that, if there is a continuing division of the island, that will make the success of the negotiations far more difficult. It is timely to try to bring about a resumption of dialogue in Cyprus, so that work can go forward towards a resolution of the political divisions that have damaged the interests of the island for so long.

Mr. Mackinlay: Can the Foreign Secretary explain how Cyprus could be admitted to the European Union when some of its national territory is occupied? Surely if it acceded to the EU, that would mean that some of the EU's territory would be occupied, which would be intolerable. Does not something have to be resolved before we can realistically discuss Cyprus's admission? Surely the question of its independent sovereignty over the whole of its territory must be settled before we can countenance its admission.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government of the Republic of Cyprus are recognised as the Government of a country that covers the whole island—although the hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the de facto division of the island makes accession to the European Union far more difficult than it would normally be. That is why I emphasised the fact that any political progress towards resolving the division would not only be desirable in itself but would make a major contribution to the success of the EU accession negotiations when they begin.

Dr. Twinn: I am grateful for what my right hon. and learned Friend has said. Does he know that his statement that neither party to the negotiations for a peace settlement would be able to veto Cyprus's entry into the European Union will be welcome on the island of Cyprus? Does that not therefore make it even more important for Britain to renew its efforts to ensure that there is a settlement this year, before the negotiations are due to start? For Cypriots of all communities, the future of Cyprus will be more secure within the Union.

Mr. Rifkind: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. The United Kingdom has given its view—that a resumption of dialogue between the two Cypriot communities should be possible this year. With other interested parties, we are actively exploring ways in which progress can be identified. United Nations forces have now been on the island for more than 27 years. When one considers the progress that has been made on major problems in other parts of the world over that period, there is no convincing reason why, with the right political will, the two Cypriot communities could not resume dialogue and work towards a common solution.

West and South Asia (Strategic Weapons)

2. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to prevent the proliferation of strategic weapons and their delivery systems in west and south Asia. [17258]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): We are concerned about the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems throughout the world. We urge all states to accede to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the chemical weapons convention and the biological weapons convention. We play an active part in efforts to control the spread of missiles and the supply of equipment related to the development of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Minister recognise that, in the 1980s, Britain passed to Iraq nuclear weapons-making technology and Vickers tanks that could have been converted into launch vehicles for missiles, and that British expertise contributed to the development of Scud missiles into long-range weapons? Now that, in the same region, there are five or six countries with nuclear weapons-making capacity and six or seven with the ability to deliver those weapons in long-range missiles, what specific guidelines do the Government have to prevent the further proliferation of that evil technology in that unhappy region?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman's retailing of a tired old story demonstrates his lack of judgment and why he was sacked from the Labour Front-Bench team some time ago. We have been active in the United Nations special commission on Iraq, which has raised continuing concerns about Iraq's ballistic missile, chemical and biological weapons programmes, and in the International Atomic Energy Agency in trying to put in place on-going monitoring and verification. Similarly, elsewhere in the area, we are encouraging countries to join the non-proliferation treaty. The hon. Gentleman would perhaps do better to join that encouragement rather than just attack this country.

Mr. Forman: Since the development of strategic weapons in west and south Asia—or any other part of the world—can sometimes be a consequence as well as a cause of very grave regional problems, is my hon. Friend aware of the urgent need for Britain to do even more to try to help reach a solution to the vexed problem of Kashmir, which is in that geographical zone? Can he bring the House up to date on how the Government are trying to bring together India and Pakistan, two prominent members of the Commonwealth, and reach a satisfactory peace for Kashmir?

Mr. Davis: There is no new initiative with respect to that part of the world. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the potential of weapons of mass destruction destabilising that part of the world. We have put a great deal of pressure on Governments there to ensure that they join the non-proliferation treaty as non-nuclear weapon states.

"Questions of Procedure for Ministers"

3. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he plans to take following the publication of the Scott report to ensure that guidance in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" is not breached. [17259]

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 26 February.

Mr. Cunningham: If, as Scott has found, Ministers should have told Parliament the truth, have not the Government been treating the matter in a light-hearted manner and should not the Secretary of State apologise on behalf of his colleagues?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is misrepresenting what happened. I do not think that I can usefully add to the matters that were very fully debated in the House not very long ago.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I appreciate my right hon. and learned Friend's reply, but does he think that, in the light of the decision taken in principle by the Public Service Committee to look at "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" and the civil service code, following the Scott report's recommendations, his Department should wait on the Committee's recommendations?

Mr. Rifkind: We await with interest any recommendations of the Public Service Committee. It is worth remembering on behalf of those concerned with open government that the last Labour Government never thought of publishing "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". The Government published, and can therefore claim credit for it.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that paragraph 27 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" places an obligation on Ministers to tell the truth? Will he further confirm that Sir Richard Scott details not one, but seven occasions when his ministerial colleagues breached that duty? Will he condemn those colleagues, or do those constitutional guidelines also have a flexible application?

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that Ministers complied with "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", and I do not believe that untruths were told. The hon. Gentleman has no foundation for making such a suggestion.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Scott report teaches us that it is always dangerous for the Government to impose greater restrictions on British industry than are imposed by other Governments? Do not those restrictions make it more difficult for people to determine whether to allow a licence? In the light of the Scott report, will the Government bring this country into line with the rest of the world on the issue of restricting the sale of arms and non-lethal military equipment to other Governments, thereby allowing British companies to sell goods and services that they are currently prevented from selling—despite the fact that the goods can be bought from other western nations?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise that the Government showed more self-restraint on the sale of equipment to Iraq than almost any other western Government, but we have received little credit for that act of self-denial. Nevertheless, we will take policy decisions based on what we assess to be the right course of action. Although that may often coincide with what other Governments are doing, we will not feel bound to change our policy simply because other Governments have reached different conclusions.

Chechnya

4. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Russian Foreign Minister to discuss the situation in Chechnya. [17260]

Mr. Rifkind: I last saw Mr. Primakov on 27 February. On that occasion, Chechnya was not discussed.

Mr. Clarke: Is the Secretary of State aware that, since Sunday, Russian troops have been bombarding and strafing a village 30 miles from Grozny called Sernovodsk? Is he further aware that a corridor has had to be created to allow refugees to leave, and that the pall of smoke can be seen for many kilometres? What representations are the Government making before the Russian presidential elections to help find a peaceful and humanitarian solution? Does he agree that the people of the world will not tolerate the present situation for much longer?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree that a political solution in Chechnya is likely to bring lasting peace and stability to that part of the Russian Federation. We hope that the Russian Government have now realised that a purely military approach is simply not working and that it is necessary for them to consider alternative means of ensuring the peaceful integration of Chechnya into the Russian Federation, to bring the violence to an end.

Mr. Elletson: Has my right hon. and learned Friend had a chance to study the report by the Quaker representative in Moscow on the assault by Russian troops and mercenaries on the village of Sernovodsk? Is he aware that that report suggests that there are more than 7,000 refugees from that village, and that the Russian troops and mercenaries involved have waged a sustained campaign—involving the use of artillery and helicopter gunships—that is continuing as we speak? Does he agree that it is time the civilised world said to the Russian Government, "Enough is enough. We will no longer turn a blind eye to the continuing barbarity in the northern Caucasus"?

Mr. Rifkind: I have not seen the Quaker report to which my hon. Friend refers, but I agree that the kind of military action that we have seen recently is to be deplored and condemned, and will damage Russia's reputation in the international community.

Export Promotion

5. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the Foreign Office and its posts overseas in promoting British exports. [17261]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): Promoting British commercial interests is our largest single activity overseas, occupying 35 per cent. of the time of front-line staff. Our network of 218 commercial posts in 140 markets provides vital help to British firms developing their export business.

Mr. Luff: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his answer probably explains why—in contrast to a few years ago, when it was difficult to find a company with a good word to say about the role of our posts overseas—there has been an increase in the number of large, medium and small companies that are happy to pay tribute to the work done by those posts, both in trade promotion and in encouraging inward investment? In this respect—as in so many others—does not that show that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget represents excellent value for money?

Mr. Hanley: I thank my hon. Friend for that last remark. There is little doubt that the four Ministers on the Front Bench were shouting, "Hear, hear!" My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The chairman of Rolls-Royce said recently that many of his company's overseas contracts had been won with the help of Foreign and Commonwealth Office posts. British Petroleum says that the British embassy in Baku and the FCO have made a tremendous contribution to the development of its business in Azerbaijan since 1992. The British high commission in Islamabad has helped National Grid to win a contract of more than $700 million.

My hon. Friend is right: small companies need help too—and they get it. The director of a small Sussex company, Wylam Hill, says that, without the help of posts overseas, about 80 per cent. of his exports would not have happened.

Mr. Eastham: What assurances can the Minister give that, when hon. Members write to the Foreign Secretary—as I did in 1988 about some of the exports to Iraq—they will get an honest answer? I received cock-and-bull stories denouncing and denying the facts that I laid before him. Does the Minister think that we are entitled to some honesty in this House?

Mr. Hanley: Everything I just said is the truth and I know that the hon. Gentleman will want to celebrate the success of our exports and inward investments in recent years.

Mr. Batiste: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the best way in which the Foreign Office can help British exports to Israel is by bringing the peace process back on the rails? Can he confirm that he is giving all help to Israel in supplying the information needed to deal with the threat from the Hamas terrorists? Is he encouraging the United States to do the same?

Mr. Hanley: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend that stability and growth in Israel and in the economies of both Israel and the Palestinians are vital in helping to underpin the peace process. Indeed, we are increasing our exports to Israel in a remarkably successful way and I pay tribute to all of those who have increased their efforts in recent years. The answer to the other point my hon. Friend raised is yes, we will of course supply such information as comes to us.

Mr. Fatchett: While every hon. Member applauds the efforts to increase British exports, will the Minister give us some sign of the priority that his Department attaches to the human rights record of a potential trading partner? For example, is he aware that the House was told that the Government's policy was to provide no specific encouragement to British firms to trade or invest in Burma—a country with an appalling human rights record? How does he square that with the fact that, only last week, the Government sponsored a trade mission to Burma, regardless of that country's human rights record? Is not he embarrassed by the statements by the Burmese opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, that the Government are more concerned with making money than with encouraging democracy and human rights in Burma? Is not it time that the Government stood for democracy and human rights, not just in Burma but throughout the world, and put it at the top of the list of priorities?

Mr. Hanley: Our absolute priority is to support democratic reform in Burma. We continue to make it clear to the State Law and Order Restoration Council—SLORC—that the resumption of normal relations is conditional on progress in key areas, including human rights and political and economic reforms. We work very hard indeed leading the international community to help bring about change in Burma, and we will continue our efforts—including at the forthcoming session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. It is entirely wrong to suggest that our support for reform in Burma is weakening just for commercial reasons. It is not.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my right hon. Friend endorse the great importance of having defence attachés with a combination of adequate rank and sufficient

commercial nous to open doors at the right level in the countries to which they are posted? Will he work closely with his ministerial colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the 400,000 jobs in this country that are dependent on defence exports are protected?

Mr. Hanley: I agree with my hon. Friend. Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff overseas devote more than 42 staff years each year to promoting inward investment to all parts of the United Kingdom and securing jobs through exports. Eleven overseas posts have dedicated inward investment teams as well. He is right that the number of jobs that are secured in Britain by our efforts abroad is remarkable and has increased dramatically in recent years. In addition, he has put his finger on the point that our diplomats abroad are now often specially trained in trade matters. Many of our ambassadors and high commissioners have acted as specialist trade diplomats beforehand and they now regard trade as part of their diplomatic work and not just as a chore that they have to add to their diplomatic efforts.

Former Yugoslavia

6. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of the arrest of those held responsible for crimes against humanity in former Yugoslavia. [17262]

Mr. Rifkind: We believe that those responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law should be brought to justice. We strongly support the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Winnick: Is it intended that the implementation force should apprehend Karadzic and other criminals wanted by the international tribunal in The Hague? Does the Foreign Secretary agree that bringing such war criminals to justice would be a lesson for other war criminals such as those who are masterminding the terror in Israel against Israeli civilians—men, women and even young children? Perhaps they would be taught that, if they inflict such terror, the time will come when they will appear before the international tribunal at The Hague.

Mr. Rifkind: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, 52 persons have been indicted on a charge of alleged war crimes in Bosnia. If IFOR has the opportunity to arrest of any of those 52 persons, it is under a responsibility to do so. I am sure that it would carry out its responsibilities. I agree that any success in those matters would have a salutary effect in other parts of the world.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that those who have been indicted will, under the terms of the Dayton agreement, be ineligible to stand for any elected office?

Mr. Rifkind: That is indeed the case. It is clear that, under the Dayton accord, an alleged war criminal cannot stand for office in the forthcoming elections.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Foreign Secretary mentioned that more than 50 Serbs and Croats have been indicted before the war crimes tribunal. Does he agree that it is unsatisfactory that only two have so far been arrested? Does he recognise that it is difficult for the public to understand that, with 60,000 troops in Bosnia, it is not possible for IFOR to arrest such high-profile figures as Mr. Karadzic, even when he passes through its checkpoints? Will he urge IFOR to accept that bringing the top war criminals to justice is not a distraction from its work, but central to any hope of restoring peace and reconciliation to Bosnia?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. I do not think that there is any disagreement about the importance of apprehending alleged war criminals. Of course, there are practical problems that have to be taken into account. People such as Karadzic and Mladic ensure that they are well protected by heavily armed men when they move around. That is a practical consideration that must be borne in mind. I agree that IFOR must use any opportunity that presents itself to achieve their apprehension.

Iraq (Nuclear Weapons)

7. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date Her Majesty's Government first received reports relating to Iraqi nuclear weapons development programmes. [17263]

Mr. Rifkind: Although there had been suspicions for some years that Iraq had a programme for developing nuclear weapons, no evidence was found until the International Atomic Energy Agency's sixth inspection in Iraq in September 1991.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Secretary of State recall that, on 19 April 1990, when Saddam Hussein was known throughout the world to have three nuclear weapons programmes going, in answer to a question of mine to the present Chief Secretary to the Treasury that called for the IAEA to beef up its inspections of the nuclear weapons installations, I was told that inspections by the authority would not be increased and that, as Saddam Hussein had signed the non-proliferation treaty, the British Government had full confidence that he would abide by his international obligations and not develop nuclear weapons? Was that a misleading answer?

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I should like to check *Hansard* to identify the precise words that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary used. With regard to evidence about the nuclear weapons aspirations of Iraq, it is to the IAEA that one must look. It had made five previous inspections and been unable to find evidence. Only on its sixth inspection, in September 1991—some time after the exchange to which the hon. Gentleman refers—did it report that it had discovered evidence that supported the claims.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that a major problem with attempts to discover and confirm whether such programmes existed—although there was plenty of good, hard evidence that they did—was that many of the programmes were farmed out to neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, which

undertook quite a lot of technology and research that was subsequently transferred to Iraq, and North Korea, which provided the launch technology? Does not that help to confuse the issue and confirm that proliferation is, and has been, taking place?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. For obvious reasons, the Iraqi Government wished to conceal any indication of their true intent. We know that they sought to conceal their efforts in many ways. It is interesting to note that the international community discovered only a few months ago the extent of the Iraqi Government's biological weapons programme, which they concealed for several years—even following the Gulf war. That is an example of the means that the Iraqi Government employed in an attempt to deceive the world.

Mrs. Clwyd: As the United Nations special commission has now given the British Government the names of British companies that supply the components of chemical and biological weapons and that have assisted in the nuclear warfare programme, what action do the Government intend to take against those companies? Such companies have been prosecuted in the United States and in Germany, but no prosecutions have yet occurred in this country. What will the Government do about that situation?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Lady will accept that prosecutions can take place only if there is evidence of a company having broken the law. Prosecutions are normally brought if there is such evidence.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that Prime Minister Begin deactivated the Basra reactor in 1981? Should he not receive posthumous praise from the Foreign Office to compensate for the condemnation that he suffered then?

Mr. Rifkind: As I said earlier, we were suspicious of Iraq's true intentions for many years. I am not able to speculate about what hard evidence the Israeli Government may have had at that time. It is clear that they also had great suspicions but, if they had hard evidence, they did not share it with the rest of the world. It was inevitable, therefore, that their actions gave rise to criticism then.

Cyprus

8. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to facilitate a settlement of the Cyprus dispute within the terms of United Nations Security Council resolutions. [17264]

Mr. David Davis: We remain committed to an active search for an overall settlement in Cyprus. The process of UN-led negotiations and discussions with both communities and the relevant decisions of the Security Council are at the heart of that search.

Mr. O'Hara: There is an increasing tendency to view the Dayton model as a possible way of achieving a solution to the Cyprus problem. Does the Minister agree that there is a danger that that would result in a quick fix that would not produce a lasting solution? Will he give a commitment on behalf of Her Majesty's Government that any future negotiations regarding a solution to the problem—irrespective of whether they are founded on the Dayton model—will be based on existing United Nations resolutions and its set of ideas, with particular reference to one undivided island, one people, one federal Government and undivided sovereignty?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman will remember that I addressed that issue during the Adjournment debate this morning. We believe that any achievements will be based on the United Nations' set of ideas and the notion of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. The hon. Gentleman made a very good speech in the debate this morning—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—as did a number of my hon. Friends. The Government are pursuing every possible avenue towards achieving that end.

Sir George Gardiner: Will my hon. Friend tell me what incentive there is for the Greek Cypriot Government to reach an accommodation with the Turkish Cypriot community? As things stand, they benefit from the fiction that they govern the whole of the island, rather than just a part of it, and any international development aid to the island is channelled through them, to the detriment of the Turkish Cypriot community. Are not we more likely to achieve a settlement by adopting a more even-handed approach to the two communities?

Mr. Davis: It is a pity that my hon. Friend did not attend this morning's Adjournment debate, because a number of the virtues of settlement were put by hon. Members who were arguing the Greek Cypriot advantage. Therefore, his original premise does not stand. It is clearly in the interests of the whole island that there is a peaceful and lasting settlement of the problem.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

9. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the prospects for stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina following the withdrawal of the implementation force. [17265]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): The key to lasting stability remains in the parties' hands. They have to support the peace agreement, implement it fully and maintain it after IFOR leaves. However, we shall be working with our allies and partners throughout the year to help maximise the prospects for stability after IFOR's withdrawal.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister face up to the fact that the timetable for the withdrawal of IFOR is unrealistic and dangerous? Even with the best will in the world—there is not much of that in Bosnia just now—it is almost certain that there will be a return to ethnic conflict if there is a withdrawal of international forces without proper safeguards, and a visible and credible international presence in 1997. It has taken four bloody years to get to where we are in Bosnia. Is it worth putting that peace in jeopardy just to keep to an artificial timetable that has been set to meet the American electoral cycle?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The best hope for peace in Bosnia is that we keep firmly to the timetable to which the hon. Gentleman referred—we have to keep the focus on peace firmly in place for the rest of this year. Recently, I visited Serbia and I spoke to President Milosevic. I believe that the pressure from Serbia and Croatia on the Bosnians to maintain peace will be very strong. I hope that we can withdraw IFOR at the end of this year as planned, and that we will then be able to take it forward with the civilian implementation that we look forward to helping them achieve.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Minister agree that we shall be better able to assist political stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the withdrawal of the implementation force if the European Union has a co-ordinated foreign policy towards the country? Would not the Foreign Secretary's welcome and entirely sensible suggestion last night for a foreign policy co-ordinator for the European Union be a valuable contribution towards that objective?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposal for a co-ordinator responsible to the Council of Ministers for the decisions made collectively by those Ministers. I hope that it will be of great assistance in achieving a lasting peace in Bosnia when IFOR withdraws at the end of the year.

Ms Quin: The Foreign Secretary, in his statement to the House on 22 November, talked about ending the arms embargo on Bosnia in two phases—the second of which will include artillery, heavy weapons, mines, and so on. In view of the horrific injuries that are inflicted on civilians in Bosnia because of land mines, will the Minister give a firm commitment that Britain, even after the ending of the arms embargo, will not export land mines to Bosnia? Will the Minister also give a commitment that he will play an active role within the European Union to ensure that European Union countries do not export land mines?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The United Kingdom resists any supply of such weapons in areas where they are likely to cause danger to civilian life, and that will continue. I cannot give an absolute assurance for the long term, but I give an assurance that so long as IFOR troops are there the United Kingdom will neither re-arm nor supply such weapons to any party in Bosnia.

Arms Exports

10. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines on the export of arms to individual countries are currently applied by his Department. [17267]

Mr. David Davis: It is our policy to support the sale of British defence equipment overseas where this is compatible with our political, strategic and security interests. We consider applications for licences to export defence equipment on a case-by-case basis in the light of established criteria, including the international guidelines and obligations to which we are committed.

Mr. Cohen: Paragraph D4.30 of the Scott report says that the former Prime Minister was inaccurate and misleading in parliamentary answers to me on the guidelines, and paragraphs D4.5, D4.6, D4.11 and D4.12, among others, refer to the untruthfulness of the then Foreign Minister. Therefore, how are Parliament and the public to know that the current guidelines are interpreted properly and have not been secretly changed, revised or flexibly interpreted? Until trust can be restored, would it not be best to have an open register, perhaps in the Library of the House of Commons, listing all the exports of weaponry or weapon-making equipment to countries that are in the guidelines?

Mr. Davis: I might surprise the hon. Gentleman. The DTI policy guidelines in such matters are under review. It will take a little time to conclude that review, but when it is concluded, I shall put a copy in the Library of the House of Commons.

Intergovernmental Conference

11. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials in his Department are currently working on matters related to the IGC. [17268]

Mr. Rifkind: We set up an intergovernmental conference unit last January. It has a staff of nine, including support staff. A number of other FCO officials in London and at European Union posts spend part of their time on intergovernmental conference issues.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. Are any of those civil servants considering whether there should be a commitment in the IGC White Paper to a referendum on a single currency? If so, does he agree that such a commitment should be made and does he, therefore, support the rabid right of his party in demanding the sacking of the Chancellor?

Mr. Rifkind: The intergovernmental conference is concerned only with proposals to amend the treaty; therefore, questions relating to European monetary union will not arise.

Mr. Redwood: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that there is growing anger in Britain about the judgments and powers of the European Court of Justice? Will he make it a priority area for the IGC and will he introduce proposals urgently for the House of Commons and House of Lords to assert their rights against the ECJ, bearing it in mind that the German constitutional court limits ECJ judgments in Germany?

Mr. Rifkind: I very much agree with my right hon. Friend that, in the terms expressed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food yesterday, it is clearly important to respond to the very unwelcome judgment that was made in the Factortame case. We have a number of ideas for improving the working of the European Court of Justice that we will submit to the intergovernmental conference. We are also willing to consider other ideas whereby both Houses of Parliament can have additional influence in seeking to ensure that the fundamental traditions and requirements of our country are taken into account.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Foreign Secretary made a number of interesting points in his speech in Paris yesterday. They included the idea that there should be a European Union figure to represent foreign policy. As he supports that view, is it the Government's view and will it be proposed at the IGC?

Mr. Rifkind: I said in my speech, and am happy to repeat, that on issues where British foreign policy coincides with that of other countries—for example, in the middle east, Hong Kong and other parts of the world—it is sensible to use the added weight of the European Union in furthering our interests. When 15 countries have committed themselves to a single foreign policy objective, it is necessary to co-ordinate that policy on a day-to-day basis. That is why we believe that the appointment of a civil servant or official to assist Foreign Ministers would be a useful innovation.

Mr. Dykes: As senior Ministers have promised yet again to become more enthusiastic about our membership of the European Union, instead of leaving it to the Chancellor of the Exchequer or occasionally the Deputy Prime Minister, is it not important that my right hon. and learned Friend puts the record straight on the European Court of Justice, bearing it in mind that in the latest dispute on fishing matters, in order to dampen down the temperature of some of our colleagues, we should remind the public that many Spanish fishing boats are owned by British companies?

Mr. Rifkind: That is as may be, but there is a widespread belief which I am sure is shared on both sides of the House that the purpose of national quotas was to benefit national fishermen. In so far as that has not been the case, as a result of the decisions of the European Court of Justice, it is right and proper that the Government should give priority to seeking to rectify the position and ensuring that national quotas operate in the way that was clearly intended by the Council of Ministers when the policy was first introduced.

Mr. Robin Cook: May I commend to the Foreign Secretary the excellent leaflet by the Chemicals Industries Association entitled "Why Europe matters to you"? It warns that, if we are to keep chemical factories and jobs in Britain, we must take a positive role in Europe. Does the Foreign Secretary endorse that conclusion? If so, will he recommend another reading of the pamphlet to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who ripped up his copy when it was presented to him? On the verge of the IGC, will the Foreign Secretary take this last opportunity to advise some Conservative Members that it would be better if they rip up their prejudices before they break up Britain's business links with Europe?

Mr. Rifkind: I have not had the pleasure of reading that leaflet, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I will not tear it up before reading it. I will withhold judgment on what to do with it until I have read it.

On business links with Europe, the hon. Gentleman should consider the damage that would be done to our business interests by the imposition of the social chapter, as advanced by the Labour party. A couple of days ago, I was interested to read in the press that the Labour party is now in secret discussions about limiting its commitment to implement the social chapter. It is clearly beginning to recognise the intense damage that the social chapter would do to British jobs. We hope that there will be an early opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to explain to the House why the Labour party is now admitting what it has spent the past year trying to deny.

Taiwan and China

12. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his office has taken to reduce tension between Taiwan and China. [17270]

Mr. Hanley: We are very concerned about the increased tension in the Taiwan straits and its potential effect on the stability and development of the region. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised those concerns with the Chinese Premier, Li Peng, when they met in Bangkok on 29 February. We urge both sides to resolve their differences peacefully.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that extremely helpful and comprehensive reply. However, has he had an opportunity to read reports in today's press which give details about Chinese guided missile tests taking place in the Taiwan straits, with a resultant substantial increase in tension between China and Taiwan? Given the importance of China and Taiwan to that region, is my right hon. Friend able to place before those two nations the resources of his office in an effort to reach some form of mediated settlement?

Mr. Hanley: We certainly saw the reports to which my hon. Friend refers, and they are worrying. We will have to consider carefully what other steps we will take if there is a danger to shipping, for example, from such activities. The activities are regrettable. It would be far better if Taiwanese politicians lowered their rhetoric and if the Chinese Government lowered their overreaction.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister agree that it would help to lower tension if China followed Taiwan in moving down the road to greater democracy and open elections, and that the free world at large is not terribly impressed by any attempt to be bully boys?

Mr. Hanley: Democracy in Taiwan is certainly an important development, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows how the British Government view the status of Taiwan. That view remains unchanged. It is sad that tension is rising during the democratic elections in Taiwan. We urge the Chinese not to overreact as a result.

European Union

13. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet the German Foreign Minister to discuss the future development of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [17271]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend regularly discusses EU issues with his German counterpart.

Sir David Madel: Does my hon. Friend agree that the priorities for discussions with our German partners are the renegotiation of our respective budget contributions to the European Union, the cost of enlargement of the EU and the need to reform the common agricultural policy, and that those matters must take precedence over the question of a single currency?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend very accurately summarises the serious policy issues that run in parallel with the intergovernmental conference and that equate to it in importance. We must firmly address and resolve those issues before enlargement, which is probably the biggest single issue facing the EU for the next couple of decades.

Mr. MacShane: Is the Minister aware that, some months ago, the Germans put forward the idea of a Mr. Europe for foreign affairs? In fact, that was first proposed by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who wants the job himself. Although we may congratulate the Foreign Secretary on trailing behind the Germans and French, it would be a pleasure if we had a Foreign Secretary who could take the lead in shaping Europe. Is not that job, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman endorsed yesterday, a perfect come-back job for the Governor of Hong Kong, Mr. Chris Patten—that solid pro-European, whom we would all welcome back to our Benches?

Mr. Davis: I start from the first point made by my right hon. and learned Friend, which is that the function is for an official, not a gifted politician. Secondly, it is for someone—not as suggested by Mr. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing—with no right of initiative, someone who has to obey what the Council says and who would represent our policies, not decide them.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Will my hon. Friend assure the House that, in his discussions with his German counterpart tomorrow, he will make it perfectly clear that the future development and security of the European Union depend very largely on the security arrangements that we make on a transatlantic basis?

Mr. Davis: I can give that undertaking without reservation. Throughout our dealings with the European Union, we have made it clear that we view NATO as the pre-eminent organ for protecting Europe and that a major part of that organisation is, of course, the transatlantic dimension which we will preserve at all costs.

Scott Report

14. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the findings of the Scott report relating to his Department. [17272]

Mr. Rifkind: Improvements in a number of areas identified in Sir Richard Scott's report are already in place or are under active consideration by Ministers and officials.

Mr. Hain: Despite the damaging criticisms on page after page of the Scott report to the effect that Ministers, including the Chief Secretary to the Treasury—who was then a Foreign Office Minister—deliberately and designedly misled Parliament, why has no one in this arrogant Government even bothered to apologise?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman might at least have had the courtesy to read the report before making such comments. He suggests that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary deliberately misled the House; Lord Justice Scott explicitly exempts my right hon. Friend from such a charge.

Intergovernmental Conference

15. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the Government's priorities for the European Union's intergovernmental conference. [17273]

Mr. David Davis: The Government have set out their approach to the forthcoming intergovernmental conference in the House on a number of occasions. The forthcoming White Paper will provide a comprehensive review.

Mr. Marshall: I thank the Minister for that reply, but will he give greater priority to introducing greater openness in the decision-making process within the various institutions of the European Union? If he agrees with that basic proposition, will he give some idea of how greater transparency could be introduced into the decision-making processes of the Council of Ministers?

Mr. Davis: We are already at the forefront of increasing transparency in the European Union. So long as it is within our practical range, we are always willing to pursue that. By "practical range", I mean that I do not want to see transparency to the extent that it drives negotiations into corridors, which would be self-defeating. An example of what we have done is that, after each Council meeting, we always put down a parliamentary answer that reflects our votes and opinions in the Council.

Mr. Sumberg: Should not one of our priorities at the IGC be to deal with the widening gap between public opinion and Governments throughout the European Union? Would not that gap be closed in this country if we were to offer the people a referendum on any substantial change to the Maastricht treaty or if there were a single European currency?

Mr. Davis: The position on a single European currency has been made very clear by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and I have already made clear our position on the IGC. I do not expect the IGC to create a major transformation of the Maastricht treaty. It should therefore not lead to a major constitutional change, which is usually the premise on which referendums are based. However, the idea of trying to bring together the Union and the peoples of the Union—trying to make people understand, or allowing them to understand, the benefits of the Union and what it is trying to do—is very much part of our strategy in dealing with the IGC and one that is crucial to the success and longevity of the European Union.

Mr. Skinner: When the Minister goes across to the next conference and, subsequently, to the intergovernmental conference, will he make it plain—it is time somebody did—that the majority of the British people are fed up to the back teeth with talk of federalism? They are fed up with fraud in the Common Market, they are fed up with the fisheries policy which is throwing thousands of people out of work, and they are fed up with all the talk about a single currency. The truth is that the threads that held the Common Market together are now falling apart. It has been an unmitigated disaster and it will be a good job when we have got rid of it.

Mr. Davis: I am not wholly clear whether the hon. Gentleman was addressing those remarks to me or to his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that, although my constituents feel annoyed when judgments from the European Court of Justice overrule sovereign law made by the House, they are maddened and enraged when retrospective judgments are made, especially those with the potential for large amounts of compensation? Will my hon. Friend make it a priority that this country should seek a treaty change at the IGC to outlaw all retrospective judgments of the European Court?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend may have seen some proposals that I put forward on behalf of the Government, when I attended the reflection group in the summer, for reform of the European Court of Justice. Two of the items put forward addressed directly the judgment that was made yesterday against us. One was about retrospectivity, and I shall supply a copy of the paper to my hon. Friend; indeed, it is in the Library. The other item made the point that Governments should not be subject to damages if they act in good faith or, in other words, they have not deliberately transgressed the law. Had we had that change before yesterday's decision—although that was not possible—it would not have arisen.

When those proposals were published, we did not get one jot of support from any of the Opposition parties, whatever hypocritical nonsense they produce in the next few days. They gave us no support on the solutions to those problems.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Is the Minister aware that, last week, the Foreign Secretary was good enough to meet an all-party delegation from the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats on behalf of the European Movement? The Foreign Secretary told us that the forthcoming governmental White Paper would be mature, constructive and positive and would make a serious contribution to the debate about the European Union. Given that, plus the Foreign Secretary's positive speech in Paris last night, with its interesting foreign policy ideas, could the Minister confirm that he now shares the new-found Euro-enthusiasm in the Foreign Office?

Mr. Davis: After my previous reply, I am glad that the hon. Gentleman stood up next, because he and his party are the best demonstration of the sort of unthinking Euro-centralism that will end up destroying faith in Europe, thereby undermining Europe's best achievements.

Sir Roger Moate: Will the White Paper clarify the role of the new European Union foreign affairs spokesperson? Will that person speak only when there is general agreement and then will he represent our views? In those circumstances, will our Foreign Secretary agree not to speak? What happens when there is disagreement? Is it then understood that the spokesperson will say nothing and our Foreign Secretary will be allowed to speak? Will my hon. Friend clarify the relative positions?

Mr. Davis: I venture to say that there are few circumstances in which my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary would undertake not to speak on matters that relate to the important interests of this country.

My hon. Friend should read the excellent speech made by my right hon. and learned Friend in Paris yesterday. It makes the status of that spokesman very clear: he will work solely under the control of the Council of Ministers, he will not have the right of initiative, and he will not be able to overrule individual countries because there will be unanimity at all points. In other words, he will be the servant of the Council of Ministers and, therefore, the servant of the national interests of all the countries of the European Union.

European Union

22. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the President of the European Commission to discuss the function of the European Union. [17284]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary last met Mr. Santer on 28 January.

Mr. Betts: Was there discussion on that occasion of comments by the French European Affairs Minister, Mr. Barnier, that there was no possibility of agreeing in the intergovernmental conference to any expansion of the European Union without serious discussion of the possibility of extending to all countries that want to join the EU the veto on all matters that the veto currently covers? The French position appears to be that, if the British are not prepared to discuss the veto, the French are not prepared to discuss the expansion of the Union.

Mr. Davis: That is not the way that the matter was presented in the study group.

Intergovernmental Conference

25. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policies Her Majesty's Government will adopt at the forthcoming IGC on how best to enhance democracy and transparency within the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [17287]

Mr. David Davis: We are committed to making the European Union more transparent, and to enhancing democratic accountability—especially by increasing the role of national Parliaments in the European Union. We are considering a number of proposals to achieve that, including an idea proposed by the European Legislation

Committee of a minimum period for documents to be available for scrutiny by national Parliaments, with procedures for urgent legislation.

Mr. Salmond: Can the Minister tell me what will be the Government's strategy if they fail to renegotiate the fisheries policy at the intergovernmental conference?

Mr. Davis: I am tempted to say no, but the Government's strategy in respect of fisheries policy is straightforward and was set out by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food yesterday. He said that we would take the matter to the IGC, if necessary; deal with it in other forums, if necessary; deal with treaty amendments, if necessary; and deal with protocol changes, if necessary. We will not be the only country in that position. Other countries suffer from quota hoppers, and those countries' interests are similar to our own.

Mr. Garnier: Will my hon. Friend, to enhance transparency and democracy, have a word with the Leader of the House to arrange a debate on the White Paper before the IGC—not least because that would provide the Opposition with an opportunity to have their seventh, eighth, ninth or 10th European Union policy change?

Mr. Davis: I will relate my hon. and learned Friend's comments to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. My hon. and learned Friend is right, although I am not sure that he was talking about seven, eight or nine changes of policy in a decade or—the way that it is looking now—in a few months.

Mr. Gapes: Does the Minister agree that

"Britain cannot stop or divert the rest of the Community taking what they believe to be the next logical steps"?

Those were the words of the Deputy Prime Minister, writing in 1989.

Mr. Davis: The Maastricht treaty is clear. Any changes to it can be only by consensus—by unanimity. In that, every country has a veto and an equal say, but the group cannot change without the consensus of the whole European Union.

Mr. Riddick: Returning to the proposed new foreign affairs spokesman, does my hon. Friend agree that there are already enough people in the European Union speaking on a range of issues and that we do not need yet another supremo—whatever he or she may say or whatever his or her brief may be?

Mr. Davis: This is the first time in history that my hon. Friend has been on the same side as the European Commission, because it does not like the proposal. One reason is that the proposed spokesman will not be a supremo but will be subordinate to the nation states of Europe—and that is the way it is going to stay.

Ministerial Accountability

26. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that the principle of ministerial accountability is upheld. [17288]

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Lady to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 26 February.

Mrs. Clwyd: As Scott demonstrated time and again that Ministers were accountable neither to Parliament nor to the British people, will the Minister have a second go at answering the question that I asked him earlier? The United Nations special commission has given the Government details of the British companies that supplied chemical, biological and nuclear warfare components to the Iraqi people. What investigations are the Government undertaking into that information?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Lady's question relates to the prosecutions. She knows that prosecutions are not a matter for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; therefore, she must make inquiries of the relevant authorities.

Middle East (Peace Process)

27. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the middle east peace process. [17289]

Mr. Rifkind: Despite the recent tragic events in Israel, we very much hope that the peace process will continue to make progress.

Mr. Ross: The whole House will be glad that we have managed to reach this question, so that it can express its condolences to the families after the latest terrorist incidents in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the courage and vision shown by Prime Minister Peres in his determination to stick with the peace plan? Does he share the concern that we need to do more in the hiatus between now and 29 May, when Israeli elections will take place, to ensure that the peace negotiations continue, if at all possible? Will he join me in sending the best wishes of this Parliament to the inaugural session of the Palestinian Legislative Council, which will meet in Gaza tomorrow for the first time?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. One of the most impressive responses to these ghastly incidents was the demonstration by Palestinian women against terrorism, showing that they support the peace process pursued by Prime Minister Peres and President Arafat and by all those who have the best interests of Palestinians and Israelis at heart.

Common Fisheries Policy (Factortame Judgment)

3.30 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East) *(by private notice)* asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the judgment of the European Court of Justice as its affects Spanish and other fishing interests and the British taxpayer.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): It is helpful to have this opportunity to develop further the points that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I made yesterday in immediate response to the text of the Factortame judgment.

Let me first deal with the court's judgment. It is a stage, albeit an important one, in the action brought in the divisional court against Her Majesty's Government for damages in respect of the losses that Spanish and other owners of fishing vessels incurred as a result of their exclusion from the UK register and consequent inability to fish.

The divisional court sought guidance from the European Court, and the latter has now ruled that member states are obliged to make good damage caused to individuals by breaches of Community law attributable to the state where the national legislature was responsible for the breach in question and where the breach is sufficiently serious. Importantly, the court also ruled that it is for national courts to decide whether such a breach has occurred and what damages are available.

There has been speculation about the damages that might be payable. It is far too early to comment, because it is for those involved—the Factortame applicants—to decide whether to proceed with their claim and, if so, to substantiate any claim to the full.

The court's judgments in this and the earlier Factortame cases have highlighted the fact that quotas allocated to each member state do not always benefit the fishing communities of that member state. That is because the eligibility for quotas and their administration by member states have to take account of general treaty provisions—for example, on the right of establishment and the freedom of movement. That has certainly undermined the benefit that the United Kingdom fishing industry has been able to secure from the fishing opportunities available to it under the common fisheries policy.

It is clear that we should not go on as we are. That is why both the Deputy Prime Minister and I explained to the House yesterday that the Government are looking at all the options. They include pursuing treaty or other changes at the intergovernmental conference. We want to achieve measures that enable member states to ensure that fishing opportunities arising from their national quota provide real benefits to their own fishing communities and not to others.

Dr. Strang: Does the Minister acknowledge that there is deep anger throughout our fishing communities at this judgment? Surely he is aware that it will be very hard indeed to persuade British taxpayers that it is a justifiable use of their money. Is not this another demonstration of the indefensible workings of the common fisheries policy?

May I put two specific questions to the Minister? First, does he now accept that the relevant provisions in the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 were ill advised? It is true that we all wanted the legislation to succeed in preventing quota hopping—*[Interruption.]* That is what we wanted, but let me ask the Minister a legitimate question. Did any of the advice that he received—and the Government surely have access to a great deal of advice—give the slightest indication that we could be liable for compensation of this nature? *[Interruption.]* That is a perfectly reasonable question.

Secondly, we welcome the Government's declared intention of raising the matter at the forthcoming European intergovernmental conference, but can the Minister confirm that by that he means securing an amendment to the treaty, and that such an amendment will require unanimity—that one member state, Spain, for example, will be able to block it?

Finally, may I point out that there is great demoralisation throughout our fishing communities, to which this incident can only add? That demoralisation should be a matter of great concern to the House of Commons. We cannot go on like this.

Hon. Members: What would you do?

Mr. Hogg: The trouble is that the hon. Gentleman does go on like this. I interpret his response as a pretty ungracious gesture of support for the Government, but in so far as he did support our decision, I welcome that support. As I have made plain, we shall do what we can to ensure that changes are made in the treaty if necessary, so that quota hoppers cannot take advantage of national quotas.

The hon. Gentleman criticised the 1988 Act. Let me tell him that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), who was the Opposition spokesman at the time, strongly endorsed the Act. The hon. Gentleman spoke at length about the failure of the common fisheries policy, and about quota hopping in particular. His observations would have more force if his party had even mentioned the common fisheries policy in its 1992 election manifesto—or, for that matter, in its 1994 Euro-manifesto.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I warmly welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend and the Government are trying to do, especially in the context of the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. Will he confirm that this step represents a real turning point in our dealings with Europe and, indeed, our handling of the common fisheries policy?

This dreadful, diabolical decision by the European Court—along with all that led up to it—has rightly enraged our fishermen. It has also united hon. Members who take different views on Europe, including Euro-sceptics in my party and people such as me who regard themselves as pragmatic Europeans. Will my right hon. and learned Friend also confirm that we have one tremendous fight on our hands if we are to bring about the necessary changes? Will he assure us that the move has the backing of the Prime Minister and the whole Government, and that the Government are determined to see it through in the interest of justice for our fishing industry?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support, and for the thought that he has devoted to the problem

over many years. He has frequently spoken of the need to deal with quota hopping by means of treaty changes; as he will note, we are responding to his suggestions.

My hon. Friend is right in saying that the negotiations will be difficult: there is not a united view in the Council. Let me give a specific answer to his question, however. The policy has indeed been strongly endorsed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister confirmed yesterday.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Of course the Labour party backed the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, and it was right to do so. What now concerns us is that it appears that Spanish owners, or other owners for that matter, can improperly sue us for loss of trade. Although there is shared anger among hon. Members on both sides of the House about what has happened, I am not sanguine about the Government's chances of changing things at the IGC or elsewhere as, the last time the Spanish were involved in fishing discussions, the Government were weak-kneed, caved in and gave the Spanish early access to Irish waters. Will the Minister give a categorical assurance that, when discussions take place, the Government will not trade off some bargain to avoid such disputes, by giving the Spanish further access?

Mr. Hogg: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman did not try to dissociate himself from the 1988 legislation, because I have the copies of *Hansard* here in which he gave vigorous support to that legislation. The Labour party would have cut a better figure had it chosen just to mention the common fisheries policy in either its 1992 or its 1994 manifesto. Labour Members are Johnnies come lately to this business.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the cause of this deplorable state of affairs is not so much that the Government tried to do something about it with the Merchant Shipping Act, but that we have the phrase, "The seas are a common resource, open to all"? Only when we get rid of that can we begin to reassert the sovereignty of British fishing waters, and we need to do it quickly while there is still some industry left to save.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for what the Government have announced. He is right to draw attention, by implication, to the importance of safeguarding the six and 12-mile limits, and that is our intention. The court has come to its judgment as a consequence not just of the common fisheries policy, but of the general treaty provisions that provide for other member state nationals to set up business in the United Kingdom. It is the overlap between the CFP and the treaty of Rome, and not the Single European Act, which has given particular difficulty in this case.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I accept that we also supported the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, and I agree with the Minister that the Factortame judgment is inconsistent with the principle of relative stability that is at the heart of the common fisheries policy. I welcome the fact that he intends to take the matter to the IGC. What proposals does he hope to make there, which the British Government could not have made when we had the European Union presidency in 1992, when the CFP was under review? Has he considered what other countries have done? Any Spanish vessel with a British licence has it only because a British skipper has sold it. Why do other countries not have the same problem? Given that the veto will apply to Spain as well as to Britain, does he believe that a renegotiation of the CFP will be easier or more difficult with the continuation of the veto?

Mr. Hogg: I have already said that Labour Members are Johnnies come lately to this business. I have to say—although it gives me pleasure to do so—that the Liberal Democrats can be accused of being Johnnies come lately as well, because their 1992 manifesto and 1994 Euro-manifesto make no reference to the problems of quota hopping. They are simply opportunist in this matter. As to what we shall seek to do in the IGC, it is important for us to try to negotiate, within the context of the IGC, an agreement to the effect that there needs to be a close identity of interest between the ownership of the vessels that are taking advantage of national quotas and the country whose national quotas are being drawn on.

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): Is not the relevant issue at stake the power of the European Court of Justice to make laws superior to those of national Parliaments? Should we not amend the treaty in that respect? Is not the relevance of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 the fact that it was passed precisely to counteract the judgment of the court, but that after the Factortame case it failed to do so?

Mr. Hogg: I do not entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Two questions arise. The first relates to the judgment itself. If we put the Factortame question to one side for a moment, there is much in the judgment that we would welcome in the context of pursuing the single market, notably the fact that it enables nationals of member states whose rights are infringed by another member state's legislature to seek compensation for damage. I can identify a particular case—for example, the United Kingdom beef producers, who are adversely affected by the actions of the German Government or Länder. It is at least possible that they may have a claim as a result of the judgment, and that is a good thing. As for my hon. Friend's other question, the problem lies essentially not with the European Court, but with the treaty. The court is there to interpret the treaty, so if we are to remedy the problem, we must seek to change the treaty itself, either by amendment or by protocol.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): As I am the son of a fisherman and a fishergirl, I hope that the Minister will not accuse me of being a Johnny come lately to the fishing industry. Successive Administrations, with the common fisheries policy, are largely to blame for the parlous condition of the British fishing fleet. May I offer the Minister a practical suggestion? Will he give the House an assurance that at the IGC he will argue for the freedom of establishment to be circumscribed and the concept of relative stability to be emphasised? I hope that he can get across to his colleagues at the IGC and in the Council of Fisheries Ministers the fact that relative stability would help our fishing industry enormously. That is what the fishing industry argued for in 1987.

Mr. Hogg: I am not accusing the hon. Gentleman as an individual of being a Johnny come lately. I accept that he has a long-standing interest in the matter. However, I accuse his party of being Johnnies come lately, and for good reasons.

The hon. Gentleman is right that relative stability needs to be emphasised, and we take every opportunity, such as that offered by the interim review of 1992, to do just that. As for what we seek to achieve within the IGC, obviously we must formulate our negotiating position against the background of what we are likely to get allies for. In broad terms, as I said, we seek to achieve a close relationship between ownership of the vessel and the country upon whose fishing quotas it draws. That is what we seek, although it represents another way of expressing the same thing, when we talk in terms of economic benefit. Clearly, there must be a close relationship between the vessels drawing on national quotas and the countries to which those quotas belong.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Government will have no alternative but to pay compensation, funded by the British taxpayer, if the British courts find in the Spanish fishermen's favour? Does he agree that the decision is not untypical of decisions by the European Court, which consistently overrules the sovereignty of the House? I welcome his proposal to try to secure changes at the IGC, but will the Government be completely ruthless and threaten to veto everything else unless they get their way? But if they are not successful at the IGC, what will they do? Will we have to sit and watch our fishing industry die?

Mr. Hogg: On compensation, as I said earlier, it is for the applicants to prove first that there is a breach, secondly that they have suffered loss, and thirdly the quantum of that loss. Until those three elements are proved, there is no liability to pay compensation. As for parliamentary sovereignty, I return to the central point: the court seeks to interpret treaty obligations. For that reason, if we are to be effective in achieving what we would like to achieve, we must seek to bring about change in the treaty itself.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The Minister must recognise that the European Court of Justice decision adds insult to injury in this country, especially affecting our fishermen. Furthermore, it illustrates the total humiliation of Parliament that we suffered when the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 was struck down by the European Court. We must be frank with ourselves and the country. It is no good the Minister saying that he can go to the IGC and plead with it to make amendments to the common fisheries policy. Whether it is decided by unanimity or by a qualified majority, there are overwhelmingly good reasons why other European countries should relish the common resource of British fishing. We shall therefore get nothing from that.

Will the Minister face that fact, get on to the real issue and be prepared to take any action, including the denunciation of the part of the treaty that affects our fishing, so that we can restore our self-respect and the control of our own resources?

Mr. Hogg: I have a great regard for the right hon. Gentleman, whom I have known in this place for 19 years or thereabouts. I always have a high regard for what he says, but I am bound to say that I do not agree entirely with what he has just said. Of course, the negotiations will be tough. I certainly do not exclude the possibility that we shall be able to make alliances on the matter with other countries that also face the problem of quota hopping. We shall try to make such alliances on the issue.

I cannot commend to the right hon. Gentleman the policy of denouncing the common fisheries policy. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] I am just going to say why. First, I do not think that it is achievable in real politics. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Of course it is."] Secondly, it is probably undesirable. For both those reasons, I am against it. Although all of us dislike the judgment in so far as it relates to the common fisheries policy—the Factortame situation—it has the advantage of promoting the single market, as I described to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): How many more humiliations will our country have to face at the hands of the European Union before Her Majesty's Government face the reality of the common fisheries policy—that they have no hope at the forthcoming IGC of amending the treaty, because the other countries will not agree it? So long as European law has primacy over British law, there will not be remedy, even in our own courts. Will the Government therefore do the honest and proper thing and give notice at the IGC of our intention to withdraw from the common fisheries policy?

Mr. Hogg: The negotiations will be tough—nobody tries to pretend otherwise—and it is possible that we shall not succeed. I am not trying to conceal that from the House. I shall certainly not start the negotiations on the assumption that we are bound to lose. That is not my opinion.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Why not?

Mr. Hogg: "Why not?" I hear from behind me. I shall say why not. We have an extremely good case to make. There is no doubt that quota hopping derogates from the principle of national quotas. That is an extremely good argument to make, and we shall make it vigorously.

Denouncing the common fisheries policy is an illusion. First, it would be almost impossible to achieve; secondly, we would have to make such concessions as to make it unlikely to be in our interests; and thirdly, we would be in a demandeur position in many bilateral negotiations, where we would want to try to trade access to other people's waters. In my view, people should not peddle such an illusion.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Has the Minister looked at the report of the Committee debate on the Merchant Shipping Bill on 18 February 1988, when both the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and I argued that the Government should not rely on a nationality requirement on ownership to stop the quota hoppers, but should impose a residential requirement on the crews of such vessels?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman have the humility to accept that not taking that advice might have been an expensive blunder? It has been expensive, not in

terms of what the Spanish will get from the English courts, but in terms of the lost fishing opportunities for Scottish and English fishermen in the past five years. The Government are to call for treaty changes at the IGC. Why did they not do so five years ago, when the quota hoppers got back on the register and started pillaging the stocks once again? Why was the matter not a priority at that time?

Mr. Hogg: That question is of the normal quality that I have come to expect from the hon. Gentleman. His principal claim is that we should have applied a crewing criterion, but that would have been manifestly illegal.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): All hon. Members who have taken an interest in the fortunes of the British fishing industry will welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's commitment to seek treaty changes at the forthcoming IGC, and his decision will be applauded by the general public and by the fishing industry. When he meets our European partners at the IGC, will he stress that what is at stake is not just a vital British interest, but the supremacy of national Parliaments and the survival of the fishing stocks?

Mr. Hogg: During the negotiations, my right hon. and hon. Friends will assert the importance of giving real effect to the concept of national quotas, which in my view is being abrogated by the practice of quota hoping. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) asks me to recognise that there will be general applause for what I have said. Although I welcome general support, I particularly welcome his support.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The Minister referred to the Committee debates on the Merchant Shipping Bill in 1988, but he quoted selectively from them. Will he confirm that my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) warned the Government on behalf of the Opposition that the provision would fall foul of European law? The Government were warned, but ignored that. Is not that why we have the present debacle?

Mr. Hogg: I have not been quoting selectively. I have before me a copy of the Second Reading speech made by the hon. Gentleman who led for the Opposition—the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North—in which he made it plain that the Opposition gave us their wholehearted support and expressed the hope that the regulations would be introduced as soon as possible.

Mr. Robert Hughes *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hogg: I see that the hon. Gentleman is nodding.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Through no fault of his own, my right hon. and learned Friend is fast approaching a rock and a hard place. He must honour his obligations either to the European Union or to the people of this kingdom, but he cannot do both. In what way will he resolve the matter?

Mr. Hogg: I am not such a pessimist as my hon. Friend. Quota hopping seems clearly to derogate from the principle of national quotas. Almost every hon. Member accepts that and, as it is a rational argument, there is a good chance that we shall get people outside the House to accept it also. We shall certainly do our utmost to achieve that highly desirable objective.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it any wonder that the British people are full of cynicism about the Government and about politics generally when an issue such as this stares them in the face? We are an island nation, surrounded by fish—and anyone can get the fish, bar the British. Fishermen have been chucked on the scrap heap. Why does not the Minister face up to the only realistic thing that can be done, and tell those tinpot people in the Common Market that we shall withdraw from the CFP? There could be some debris floating in the wake of that decision—we should leave the Spanish and the rest to clean it up.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman gets more eccentric with age. He has almost reached retirement age, and he should take his own advice and go as soon as possible.

As regards the hon. Gentleman's particular points, to start off with, he would like us to leave the common fisheries policy. I have already made the case for not doing so. In any event, there is a gulf, as there is between himself and no doubt many of the people in the Labour party, between him and those on the Labour Front Bench. They are riven top to bottom on the subject.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I served on the Standing Committee that considered the 1988 Act. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it ill behoves the Liberal Democrats to lecture the Government today when they could hardly put in a full day's attendance on that Committee? Is not it a fact that we are no longer elected to the high court of Parliament? This House has been reduced to an annexe of Brussels, and it is a very sad day. It is frustrating our fishermen and the British people.

Mr. Hogg: And that is why my hon. Friend supports so enthusiastically the policy position that I have just announced—that is, a desire and intent within the context of the IGC to renegotiate, if need be, the part of the treaty that would tackle the problem of quota hoppers.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): But is not all this insecurity in the industry and the failure of Parliament and the Government properly to deal with Spanish access completely undermining confidence in the industry? So much so, that constituents of mine who are trawler owners are told when they approach the banks that they are no longer prepared to lend because they have no confidence in the industry. Should not Ministers be trying to restore some of the banks' confidence, so that trawler owners can look into the future with some hope?

Mr. Hogg: It is perfectly true that there is a great deal of anxiety in the fishing industry, but the essential reason is the fact that fish stocks are falling and there are too many vessels chasing what there is in the water. That is the essential problem, and until it can be addressed satisfactorily—it will be extremely difficult to do so and it will certainly involve multinational action of many kinds—the hon. Gentlemen's constituents and his constituents' bankers will be lacking confidence.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's strong stand and efforts to

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resolve the issue. Does he accept that quota hoppers are fishing in our waters with our quota only because of a decision of the European Court, and now they want compensation on top of that? I think that he has the backing of the whole House to go to Europe and resolve the matter in the interests of our United Kingdom fisherman.

Mr. Hogg: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend for the support that he has just given. There are few people in the House who know more about fisheries policy than my right hon. Friend, who had a responsibility for that function for many years when in the Scottish Office. I find his support particularly welcome.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Why will the Minister not agree that he is quoting selectively from *Hansard*? It is a question not just of the Second Reading debate on the Merchant Shipping Bill in 1988, but of the Committee stage of the Merchant Shipping (Registration Etc.) Bill in 1993, when Conservative members along with other members of the Committee pressed the Government to deal with the Factortame case. The Minister could have dealt with it then.

Mr. Hogg: I am bound to say that that is whingeing and whining of a particularly ungracious kind. I know that the Labour party is on the hook on this matter. The Opposition want us to accept that they have been treating the matter seriously, yet there was not a word about it in their 1992 manifesto or in their 1994 Euro-manifesto. I refuse to take them seriously, because they are not serious people.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this is not one of those things that the Foreign Office should see as some technical matter requiring a bit of deft footwork, to overcome a temporary problem? This is one of those watershed moments. My right hon. and learned Friend and the Fisheries Minister started off like bulldogs. Let us all hope that neither the Foreign Office nor the Commission will convert them into poodles. If they become poodles, the fishermen and others may demand that they take a visit to the vets, with a rather nasty outcome. My right hon. and learned Friend should say no, no, and no again, because the more unpopular he becomes in Brussels, the more popular he and our Fisheries Minister will become in this country. He should recognise this moment for what it is and dare to be popular.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right that this is not an occasion for subtle or diplomatic approaches. That is probably why I and my hon. Friend the Minister of State have charge of this business; we shall not be guilty of either.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Minister agree that the root cause of the problem is that the common fisheries policy, as negotiated in the early 1980s, was not subject to unanimity, and that the matter was not discussed in Committee or at any other stage during the passage of the European Communities Act 1972? Moreover, Ministers of the Crown deliberately and designedly misinformed Members of both Houses, as was pointed out at the time by the late Lord Jay. The fact that we were delivering ourselves into the hands of qualified majority voting from that time was obscured from the British public and from our fishermen. If the Minister does not agree, will he look up the record and confirm what I have said, or let me know where I have made a mistake?

Mr. Hogg: If there was real substance in what the hon. Gentleman was saying, it is passing strange that the then Labour Prime Minister, Lord Wilson, did not put the matter on his renegotiation agenda.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Is not the Factortame case yet another example of judges in the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights—and even our own judges—using their powers of interpretation to second-guess almost everything that the Government do? Is it not time for the House to send a clear message to the judges that the sovereign authority in this land is Parliament and no one else?

Mr. Hogg: Speaking generally, the business of judges is to interpret treaties or Acts. It is not the business of judges, as a general proposition, to determine policy. Although the matter goes rather wide of the subject, I agree that where judges seek to determine policy rather than to interpret statute, they exceed the powers that the House expects them to discharge.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Is it not true that when an advocate resorts to bluster and insult, it usually means that he has a weak case? Will the Minister respond directly to a direct question: in relation to compensation, can he say directly whether the Cornish boats that were damaged in the so-called tuna war and claimed compensation from the Spanish authorities 18 months ago have or have not received full compensation?

Mr. Hogg: That is a serious matter. I think that the hon. Gentleman refers to a claim for about £100,000. I raised it personally with the then Spanish Minister on several occasions. We have got an assurance that the Spanish Government will make a payment. I very much regret that we have not yet received it, although it was, of course, a socialist Government. Now that the socialist Government have been excluded from office, perhaps we shall receive rapid payment.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): In a spirit of helpfulness, and as the whole House wishes to get behind his rhetoric about saying no to the judgment, may I suggest to my right hon. and learned Friend that, to send a serious message to both the Commission and our partners in Europe, we should put a one-clause Bill through Parliament, which blocks off access of the courts to the judgment? That will demonstrate to the courts and the European Community that we mean business when we go to the IGC. He will have full support for that.

Mr. Hogg: That is an interesting proposition, but it might have the unfortunate effect of preventing British litigants from suing, for example, the German Government in the German courts.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the rule of law and the authority of any court flow partly from a broad public acceptance that the court is acting fairly and justly, and that, if any court makes manifestly unfair judgments too often, that court might begin to sow the seeds of its own destruction?

Mr. Hogg: I think that my hon. Friend is probably right about the general proposition. However, I am not sure that I would apply it to this judgment. The fault lies not with the European Court, but with the treaty. Whatever else may be clear, the European Court must interpret the treaty and we can hardly blame it for doing so. That is why we are seeking changes.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): If the Government lost a case before the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords, would my right hon. and learned Friend expect the Minister concerned to describe it publicly as "crazy" and the House of Commons to be up in arms, or would he expect a rather more respectful attitude to be adopted towards a judicial decision? Is it not clear from the attitude of the Minister, the House and the public that none of us accords to European law the same respect that we accord to domestic law? Is it not also clear that, in the end, we, as a nation, will disobey the laws of the European Union and that that will be part of the route towards a looser relationship between us and Europe?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is being somewhat disingenuous. He and I have practised for years at the common law Bar and we have appeared before many judges—some wise and some foolish. When we received foolish judgments, he and I never hesitated to say so.

Emergency and Intensive Care

4.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): With permission, I would like to make a statement about the emergency and intensive care services of the national health service.

The health service exists to provide health care to those with a clinical need. No aspect of its work is more important than its capacity to respond promptly and effectively to emergency need as and when it arises. This winter has seen those emergency services put under considerable strain. At times of peak pressure, some parts of the country have seen increases in the emergency work load of up to 20 per cent. compared with the same period last year.

In those circumstances, resources have inevitably been stretched, but, despite the pressure, the clinical needs of the overwhelming majority of patients have been met. That is a testament to the skills and dedication of the professional staff of the NHS. All of us, and particularly those who have needed to rely on the emergency services, owe them a debt of gratitude.

I told the House earlier this year that I would undertake to ensure that we learn the proper lessons from the general pressure on the emergency services this winter. I shall set out to the House this afternoon the steps that I am taking to ensure that that happens. First, it is important to separate consideration of emergency care from consideration of intensive care: they are separate, although related, issues.

Taking emergency services first, I have today charged the chief executive of the NHS with a specific responsibility of reporting to me at the end of June and again at the end of September on the plans being made by each health authority for emergency services in its area. The chief executive has written to all health authorities and trusts setting out the ground that he expects those plans to cover. In the short term, they will need to show how resources will be managed to meet short-term fluctuations in the work load. They will need to consider the use of admission wards; improving access for patients in the accident and emergency department to hospital diagnostic facilities; the relationship with local social service departments; and a number of other issues that have been shown by experience to contribute to the efficient running of emergency services.

Health authorities must also address a number of longer-term issues. First, they need to consider how they intend to strengthen the purchasing function in emergency care in order to bring a clearer focus on patients' expectations of those services. Secondly, a considerable amount of work must be done in work force planning for A and E services.

Thirdly, I have asked the chief medical officer to undertake a review of emergency care services outside hospital. It is important that health authorities plan for a full range of services, and do not rely only on hospital accident and emergency departments.

Finally, in relation to emergency services, there is one measure of quality of service about which most patients feel strongly: the time spent waiting in an accident and emergency department. The patients charter already contains a standard that calls for a person's immediate

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assessment on arrival in the department. The chief executive's review of health authority plans for the emergency services will also examine the scope for developing other standards that are understandable by patients and accepted by the professional staff as relevant indicators of quality.

I turn now to intensive care provision. Today I am publishing the report of a professional working group that has been examining best practice in the use of intensive care. The report underlines the need for a clearer professional consensus on the most effective use of intensive care facilities, and it sets out proposals for the development of that consensus. It also stresses the importance of specific discussions between health authorities and trusts about the allocation of resources to intensive care. Decisions about the resourcing of intensive care cannot be subsumed into general arrangements for other areas.

The report makes two other important recommendations. First, it recommends that plans for intensive care services should make provision for high-dependency beds that can offer care that is more intensive than ward-based care, but less intensive than a fully staffed intensive care unit.

The report concludes that, in those hospitals that have them, these intermediate facilities relieve the pressure on the intensive care unit with the result that NHS resources, both human and financial, are used more effectively. I shall be looking to health authorities to apply these findings in their own areas.

Secondly, the report recommends that the case for a national database to improve the management of intensive care bed availability should be examined. There is no doubt that the emergency bed service has been responsible for a major improvement in intensive care bed management in London and in the south-east since the system was extended last spring. The NHS will now be considering the proposal for a national register, and I shall announce the conclusion of that process this summer.

Finally, I turn to paediatric intensive care. The report of the inquiry into the treatment of Nicholas Geldard, which was published yesterday, highlighted some important failures in the service that he received. The sympathy of all hon. Members will go to Nicholas's family, who have suffered a tragic loss. The north-west region of the NHS has already made clear its determination to address the local issues that were highlighted by the report.

The main national issue that arose from the case was the availability of paediatric intensive care beds. The NHS is already committed to increasing this provision. I agree with the finding of the inquiry that

"the time for talk and discussion about this issue . . . is over".

I have asked the chief executive to prepare a specific report on the implementation of these plans. It will be presented by the end of April, and it will be published.

Health authorities have a difficult task in balancing the competing priorities of different parts of the NHS. This year is not yet 10 weeks old, and already the House has considered three important aspects of health care in its debates: the emergency services, the mental health services and the primary health sector. The hospital service must also meet the needs of patients who are put on waiting lists. These are all important services, and patients' needs must be met.

The Government have already announced that the real revenue resources of the NHS will increase next year by £500 million—that is new money available to increase the level of care available to NHS patients. The process that I have announced today will allow us to ensure that a proper proportion of that growth money is used to address the needs of the emergency patient, whose needs must be met without sacrificing the other important objectives of the national health service. I commend them to the House.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. On the casualty crisis, I welcome the fact that he has adopted three of the proposals in the five-point plan that I set out following his statement in January. Although he rubbished our proposals at the time, now—three months later—he says that he will monitor the problems carefully.

Will the Secretary of State please report to the House on the information that he receives from the chief executive in June and September? He says that someone will be appointed in each area to examine how local resources can best be used to address the problem and that specific attention will be paid to those people who are in hospital, but who could be cared for at home or in residential care.

We welcome all that, but the right hon. Gentleman has still failed to address two central problems in the casualty crisis. First, it is the cuts in hospital beds that leave patients waiting on trolleys in accident and emergency departments. Whatever his charters say, why can we not have a moratorium on bed closures? Secondly, there is still a shortage of accident and emergency staff. He said that health authorities must undertake work force planning, but does he plan to do anything about it?

It is hard to find words to express the sense of outrage and betrayal that everyone must feel on hearing how 10-year-old Nicholas Geldard died. The North West regional health authority inquiry team was shocked and dismayed by what happened to him. Although there are many organisational failures that the Secretary of State must address, does he acknowledge that the Geldard inquiry team concluded that, while Nicholas's life was hanging by a thread, no intensive care bed could be found for him, so he had to be taken by ambulance across the Pennines through a blizzard in the small hours of the morning?

Will the Secretary of State admit that the Geldard report confirms that it was not a one-off, tragic case, but that, every week in the north-west, children are turned away because there are no intensive care beds for them? Will he admit that the problem is not only in the north-west, but throughout the country?

Is it not the case that, having heard what happened to Nicholas Geldard, every parent in the country thought, "That could have been my child—it could have been me"? Every parent in the country will now fear that, if a child falls ill, the NHS might not be there.

Will the Secretary of State tell us how many children are turned away from intensive care units throughout the country each day? Should he not give the House that information today?

Why, when the Government trumpet patients charters for dozens of minor NHS procedures, will they not guarantee an intensive care bed for a child who is gravely ill? Does not the Secretary of State recognise that the shortage of intensive care beds means that patients face cancellations of heart operations—sometimes repeatedly? How many patients each year have operations cancelled because of the lack of intensive care beds? Is that not information that he, as Secretary of State, should know? Should he not tell the House today?

Does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise that patients waiting for transplants die because, when an organ becomes available, the operation cannot go ahead if there are no intensive care beds? Is not the final irony the fact that, although seriously ill patients are waiting for liver transplants, Leah Betts' liver could not save a life in Britain, but had to be flown to Spain?

The NHS must have the spare capacity to respond to emergencies. The Government do not understand that it is not slack in the system; it is a safety margin. Will the Secretary of State tell the House what he believes is the safe occupancy level for intensive care beds? Many operate at up to 100 per cent. occupancy. The Intensive Care Society believes that there should be an occupancy level of no more than 70 per cent. Does he agree with that?

Today, the Secretary of State says that he will publish another report in April, but have there not been numerous reports on intensive care? Eight years ago, the Association of Anaesthetists for Great Britain and Ireland produced a report entitled "Intensive Care Services: Provision for the Future".
In December 1993, a report was published by the British Paediatric Association's working party on intensive care and, on behalf of the Department of Health itself, came the Metcalf McPherson report. The problem is not that there have not been enough reports; the problem has been the lack of action.

Will the Secretary of State admit that there are not enough intensive care beds, and tell us how many more he believes there should be? The Intensive Care Society says that we have only 1,500 such beds but that we need 2,000. Does the Secretary of State agree with the society?

The Secretary of State referred to high-dependency beds, but will he admit that the development of such beds, although welcome, does not solve the problem of too few intensive care beds? Why does he fail to acknowledge and tackle the shortage of specially trained intensive care nurses? That failure is a disgrace and an insult to doctors, as they are the ones who have to turn away very sick patients, knowing that it might cost those patients their lives. Doctors have to make those decisions every day, yet the Secretary of State implies that they have to do so because they are somehow mismanaging their beds. The plain fact is that there are not enough beds.

Does the Secretary of State remember that the NHS changes were the Government's response to the 1988 intensive care beds crisis? The Government imposed the internal market on the NHS, with the result that there were more managers than ever before, but the problems got worse.

Why does the Secretary of State think that providing more managers is the answer to every problem in the NHS? A sick child needs a hospital bed, not a manager. Why should anyone be turned away from intensive care when an extra £1.5 billion is being spent on managers? Does the Secretary of State recognise that this is a question not of technicalities but of fundamental principle—the principle that, in an emergency, one can count on the NHS?

We cannot accept that a critically ill person whose life could be saved should be turned away. This more than anything else symbolises the Tories' failure on the NHS—if they cannot run the emergency service, how can the NHS be safe in their hands? Why does not the Secretary of State understand that it is not a matter for managerial adjustment, fiddled figures or more reports? Now is the time for him to face up squarely to the depth of the crisis and take action. If he cannot, he should not be running the NHS.

Mr. Dorrell: The final point that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) made in her long tirade was very close to the final point that I made. I quoted the report on the availability of paediatric intensive care beds and said:
"the time for talk and discussion about this issue . . . is over".
That is precisely why I have set up a process that will demonstrate publicly by the end of April the delivery of our targets for the availability of paediatric intensive care beds. There is no doubt about the need now to deliver a proper level of paediatric intensive bed space. It will be done and accounted for to the House by the end of April.

The hon. Lady began by welcoming a number of the announcements I made about the emergency services. I am grateful to her for that. She asked what was being done about staff in accident and emergency departments. She might like to know that, since 1990—this information is not based on some politically convenient figure—there has been an increase in the number of doctors and nurses committed to accident and emergency care. That shows that we have been increasing staffing resources, and we shall continue to ensure that staffing resources available to accident and emergency departments are sufficient.

The hon. Lady was confidently expecting at the end of last year that there was going to be a shortage of junior doctors at 1 February this year, when the rotations came through the accident and emergency departments. My hon. Friend the Minister for Health took action just before Christmas to ensure that there would be sufficient junior doctors to man accident and emergency departments.

Ms Harman: There are not.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady says that there are not, but we have conducted a census of accident and emergency departments. Senior house officer vacancies are currently running at 4.5 per cent., which does not imply a service with a massive inability to recruit.

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her welcome for the steps we are taking to strengthen the emergency services and to ensure that the lessons which must be learned from this winter's experience are learned. The hon. Lady was keen to argue that we need more intensive care beds.

If it were true that we had 1,500 intensive care beds in the health service, the hon. Lady would be right, but we have 2,500 intensive care beds—as I published in a parliamentary answer to her predecessor—including beds that provide coronary care. Every definition of intensive care facilities includes those that are used for planned

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surgery need as well as those that meet emergency need. That is precisely why I said in my statement that it is important to distinguish the emergency services from the intensive care service, which meets both emergency and planned need. We have 2,500 intensive care beds in the health service.

There is not much point in setting up a review engaging the professional expertise of those who work in the service, as we have done, and then ignoring its conclusions. The conclusion of the professional review, which I am publishing today, is that the best way to ensure that we meet intensive care need in the health service is to provide the high-dependency beds—which I mentioned in my statement—behind the intensive care facilities.

I would have hoped that the hon. Lady would welcome that provision as a step towards the delivery of an intensive care service for adults and children that will meet the needs for intensive care of the emergency patient and the planned patient of the health service.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. After that very long initial exchange, there will have to be brisk questions and answers.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Is it not clear that, when distressing problems arise, they are due not to any fault on the part of clinicians or to lack of resources, but to shortcomings in bed management? May I therefore welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and, in particular, his strengthening of the patients charter, which will give an incentive for better and more efficient use of beds?

My right hon. Friend may recall that, when I initiated a debate on intensive care bed provision in London last July, following the incident in which one of my constituents had to be helicoptered to Leeds, I suggested that there should be some form of national computer register of intensive care bed availability. I welcome his statement that that is now being considered, and I hope that it will be brought into effect as soon as possible.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I said in my statement, exactly that principle is now working in London and has improved intensive care bed management in London and the south-east since it was extended last April. Against the deadline that I announced, we shall review the idea that the computer register should be extended to cover the whole country.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend welcomed the charter proposal. We need to ensure that the charter sets out clear standards for service that are acceptable to patients and are also recognised by those who work in the service as relevant measures of quality.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is it not deeply shocking and grossly unacceptable that 64 hospital beds are now being closed in south Manchester, including four intensive care beds about which I tabled a parliamentary question to the right hon. Gentleman last Wednesday for priority reply today? While we both know the reasons given for these closures, is there anything he can now do against the background of his statement today to help, and, more especially, to save the four intensive care beds—because, as he knows, and indeed as we all know, closing intensive care beds costs lives?

Mr. Dorrell: The number of intensive care beds in the north-west, Liverpool and Manchester is being not reduced but increased. Paediatric intensive care provision in the north-west has risen from 20 to 30 available beds since 1993, which reflects the investment in available space. I have already announced to the House the steps that I am taking to ensure sufficient paediatric intensive care beds and that they are effectively used.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's comments about the use of intensive and emergency care beds in the Greater London area. When he writes to chief executives in central and outer London hospitals, perhaps he will address a problem identified by my two local hospitals. A number of elderly people admitted to intensive care beds have been unable to move elsewhere, so continuing to occupy beds that could be used to better purpose. There must be closer co-operation between local care in the community social services and health services. If that were given high priority, it would help enormously.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend is precisely right, which is why the relationship between hospitals and social services departments will be specifically addressed by the review.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): If some of the improvements that the Secretary of State identified are delivered, that will be welcome. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the test of whether the health service is working is whether it meets the needs that are clearly apparent? Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to ensure enough A and E consultants throughout the country?

Does the Secretary of State acknowledge the rising demand for intensive and paediatric intensive care beds because of the health service's success in keeping alive people who previously would have died? Some regions have an overall bed shortage. If the review concludes that more money is needed to buy what are expensive NHS resources, will the Secretary of State go into battle in the forthcoming Treasury expenditure round for money to meet the service's basic care needs?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman asks whether I am committed to ensuring sufficient A and E capacity to meet demand. The answer is yes. At consultant, junior doctor and nursing level, we have seen the fastest growth among professional staff in A and E departments in recent years, with a 35 per cent. increase in A and E consultants.

We need to ensure that, if demand continues to increase, as it seems reasonable to expect, we have growing professional resources to meet it. We shall keep a close eye on intensive bed capacity, although the position is more open. One conclusion of the review that I am publishing today is that one in six patients currently occupying an intensive care bed do not need the level of care provided in intensive units. In those circumstances, a substantial increase in capacity is available if we can meet those patients' needs in the kind of high-dependency bed described in my statement.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, when a Labour Government were

in charge, hospital admissions were at the whim of the union convener? He said who should go into hospital, and his friends would not bury the dead that resulted. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Does my right hon. Friend agree that emergency intensive care and what has become routine intensive care should be used as flexibly as possible—but that such flexibility will lead to even more smears and less help from the Opposition?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right. The reaction of Labour Members is a reminder of how much they dislike being reminded of their record in government in respect of the national health service. Labour was responsible for the only cut in recent years in funding available to the NHS, and for cutting nurses' pay during its time in office. My hon. Friend reminds the House that Labour was responsible for a state of affairs in which access to hospital was determined not by doctors but by the local NUPE official, as he or she then was.

That is the record of Labour in office. My hon. Friend is quite right to remind the House of that, and to draw a sharp contrast between what used to happen and what happens today, when the overwhelming experience of NHS patients, whether they need emergency care or planned care, is that care is delivered to a higher standard than ever before in the history of the NHS.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for offering the sympathy of the whole House to the Geldard family, but that really does not go far enough. The inquiry into Nicholas's death was a damning indictment of the health service on that night. The right hon. Gentleman should apologise to the Geldard family for the failures of that night, because ultimately the responsibility is his, and the situation should have been sorted out a long time ago.

Mr. Dorrell: Hon. Members' sympathy is real and is felt on both sides of the House—I agree with the hon. Lady on that. It is important, following the inquiry, that all necessary steps are taken to ensure that such circumstances do not happen again. The regional health authority has made a series of announcements since the publication of the inquiry, stating that it will take the various measures that the inquiry recommended to improve the quality of care. I have announced what I intend to do about paediatric intensive care units around the country.

A further matter that local interests in Manchester must address is the fact that some of the report's most stinging criticism was aimed at the failure of the health service and local authorities to allow the reorganisation of neurosurgery services and paediatric services in the city. The health service has proposed plans for the consolidation of neurosurgery and of paediatrics. Those plans were opposed by Manchester city council, and that has delayed their implementation.

We need to ensure that all the lessons are learned, not just some of them. The regional health authority is learning them. I have made it clear to the House that I am learning them; I hope that others will do so, too.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I strongly support the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) about hospital beds, especially in south-west London.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that my local hospitals in Kingston have a logjam of 40 beds—St. Helier hospital has a logjam of 60 beds—caused by elderly patients who are not acute or emergency patients but who are awaiting assessment and placement in nursing home beds by the social services department? Will he do something about those social services departments, particularly in Surrey county council, in Richmond, and in Merton? Or can we introduce some new form of bed—a nursing home bed—to cope with this state of affairs, because it is truly affecting the desperately needed acute services?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is entirely right to stress the importance of the relationship between hospitals and social services departments. In both the cases to which he referred, councils that are controlled by Liberal interests were responsible for those social services departments.

My hon. Friend asked what we are doing to ensure the best possible partnership between the NHS and social services departments. Part of the answer is contained in my statement: the need to ensure that accident services are planned in conjunction with social service departments. Another part of the answer is the huge increase in the resources that the Government have voted to social services departments throughout the country.

Social services departments in local authorities are some of the fastest growing programmes in any part of government. In looking for the partnership that my hon. Friend rightly says is necessary, we are entitled to look at the level of resources that have gone to social services departments, and then look for the partnership that is indeed necessary to ensure that we deliver an efficient and effective hospital service.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Why do Ministers never say sorry and never take responsibility? It is always someone else's fault. Nowadays, people have heart attacks, or are knocked down, and no one can find a hospital to take them to. Surely those people do not need a patients charter; they have a patient's right to receive treatment speedily, close to the communities in which they live.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, our experience in Yorkshire shows that people no longer feel that that is a guarantee. When will he accept that, after 17 years, it is his Government's responsibility? Our local managers say that they have been knocked sideways: junior doctors are telephoning around the country in the middle of the night trying to find beds. What a way to run a health service.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman suggests that I have sought to avoid my responsibility. I have done no such thing. I accept responsibility for ensuring that, within the health service, we have emergency services that continue to provide care of an extremely high quality, and intensive care facilities that meet the need and are properly and efficiently structured.

I was not trying to shuffle off my own responsibility when I reminded the House of the responsibility—mentioned in the report on the Geldard case—that rests with local interests in Manchester which have resisted change that the committee considered necessary. I am concerned to ensure that my responsibility is discharged, while seeking partnership with others to ensure that theirs is also discharged.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will my right hon. Friend commend Southampton hospital trust on the construction of a new neurological unit, which will be among the finest in the country? After all, time is often the difference between life and death.

May I also draw my right hon. Friend's attention to a phenomenon that I observed at first hand at St George's hospital here in London? School child after school child, returning home from school, popped into the accident and emergency unit to ask for aspirins, and to ask whether there would be a dishy doctor to dispense them. On inquiry, I have found that that is not untypical at a number of inner-city hospitals.

Doctors face double jeopardy. If they refuse to treat the children, they may be criticised for doing so; on the other hand, such a "pop-in centre" must constitute a complete misuse of the resources and facilities of the health service.

Mr. Dorrell: As my hon. Friend the Minister for Health has reminded me, my hon. Friend's local hospital provides a showcase example of the way in which a modern hospital service should work. As for the less desirable service that he has discovered in London, I shall gladly look into it and see whether I agree with his comments.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Last month, Southmead hospital trust in Bristol announced the closure of eight paediatric intensive care beds. That leaves 25 such beds for children with acute medical conditions, and represents a 25 per cent. cut in the service. The aim is to save £43,000 between now and 1 April.

The trust has acknowledged that children from the city will have to go outside Bristol for treatment. Is it not the case that we now have an 11-month health service? Does the Secretary of State accept that Bristol parents do not want another report or review, or more delay? They want a properly funded health service.

Mr. Dorrell: I remind the House that the Government have voted £500 million of new money to develop the NHS further next year. I am not referring to the huge increases in resources that have been provided in earlier years. I agree with the hon. Lady that we should not have another plan for paediatric intensive care, and I have been working on a very short time scale in order to demonstrate that that aspect is being delivered.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Will my right hon. Friend remind us of the difference in cost between an intensive care bed and a high-dependency bed? Would not an arbitrary moratorium on the closure of hospital beds, as recommended by the Labour party, slow down the creation of high-dependency beds?

Mr. Dorrell: On the second point, my hon. Friend is right. To impose a moratorium on the closure of beds that local health authorities and local trusts believe do not represent the highest priority use of resources must, by definition, mean that fewer resources are available for higher priorities.

In round terms, the figures are that an intensive care bed costs between £250,000 and £300,000 a year, and a high-dependency bed about £100,000 a year. There is therefore a substantial saving. If a patient does not need intensive care and can be cared for clinically and effectively in a high-dependency bed, there is a significant saving in making that shift. The result will be a better use of health service resources, both financial and human.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Will the Secretary of State reflect on the fact that the increase in the intensive care bed occupancy rate may look good on the accountant's balance sheet, but that it is both insufficient and dangerous if, at peak periods, there are not enough beds for patients?

Will the right hon. Gentleman give a straight answer to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on the Intensive Care Society's recommendation that the maximum occupancy level should, on average, be no more than 70 per cent? Is he committed to that figure? If so, how will he achieve it? Does he agree that, when the NHS fails to provide emergency treatment at a time of need, it means that we no longer have a comprehensive national health service?

Mr. Dorrell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that one of the health service's central functions is to deliver emergency care as and when it is needed—that was where my statement began. I do not accept his proposition that I should accept an essentially arbitrary ceiling for the average intensive care bed occupancy rate, for this reason. Frankly, it is sensible to look for ways of increasing the average occupancy rate of a bed that is costing the health service between £250,000 and £300,000 a year.

Apparently, those on the Labour Front Bench are not interested in the efficient use of that money. I am interested in ensuring that we use the resources as efficiently as we safely, clinically and effectively can. The advice of the work that I am publishing today is that one of the ways of improving the effectiveness with which we use that resource is to ensure that, behind it, there is an intermediate resource—the high-dependency bed, into which the patient who no longer needs intensive care can be moved. Of course I will look for ways of increasing the effectiveness with which NHS resources are used.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is not a case simply of resources? If it were, there would be no problem, as there has been a massive increase in NHS funding. If the Opposition believe that extra money should be made available, they have a duty and an obligation to say how much, and where they would obtain that money.

Does my right hon. Friend accept that people in the north-west, and in Ribble Valley in particular, will welcome today's announcement, because it is not a matter simply of Manchester? Blackburn, which covers part of my constituency, does not have sufficient paediatric intensive care facilities. Over Christmas, there was the tragic case of young Lewis Jackson, who had to travel from Clitheroe to Stoke-on-Trent to receive the care that he needed. Unfortunately, he tragically died.

Lewis's parents had to travel back and forth to see him there. They and other parents will therefore welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement today, that the time for talking is over and that action is needed.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I agree that we now need to demonstrate in a short time scale how a sufficient level of paediatric intensive care beds will be delivered. That is what I have undertaken to do.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Does the Minister not realise that his answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) was worrying? He seemed to imply that high-dependency beds would be in place of other acute beds. If that is the case, it will not solve the problem. In the same way that an intensive care bed can be freed up by moving to high-dependency beds, so a high-dependency bed must be freed up by moving to acute beds. If the number of acute beds has been cut, we are back to the problem we started with.

Mr. Dorrell: Unless, by addressing the relationship between the hospital and the social services department, we could reduce the current inappropriate use of ward space and ward beds. The answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) was not intended to suggest a trade-off between high-dependency beds and ward beds. That is not my position.

If, at the level of the individual hospital, managers conclude that there are higher priorities for the use of NHS resources than maintaining the prevailing level of ward bed space, it would be wrong for me to seek to second-guess them. The question that every manager must address all the time is: what is the most effective way of using the money? There is not a direct trade-off—the hon. Gentleman is right about that—but nor is there an insistence that the introduction of high-dependency beds must be accompanied by the maintenance of the same number of ward beds. That would be equally absurd.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I thank my right hon. Friend for what he said about accident and emergency departments. In view of the increase in the number of people using such departments, will he agree to reconsider the proposal that the Edgware A and E department be replaced by a mere minor accident unit?

Mr. Dorrell: As my hon. Friend knows, that was the subject of a decision announced many months ago. As he also knows, work is currently taking place concerning the range of services to be provided in the new Edgware hospital. I am not in a position to announce a premature conclusion to that process, but I note what my hon. Friend says.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, before his letter to Sheffield children's hospital just before Christmas, there was no national monitoring of the occupancy of intensive care paediatric beds? Does he agree that that absence of monitoring was nothing short of disgraceful? Has his announcement superseded the monitoring work that the children's hospital was asked to do only one month ago?

Mr. Dorrell: No, it has built upon the work that the children's hospital was asked to do at the end of January. The answer to the hon. Lady's question is that, if I had not believed that there was a need not currently being met, I would not have written to Sheffield hospital.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, especially the idea that hospital trusts must pay proper attention to how they manage intensive care beds. Does my right hon. Friend agree that health authorities have a responsibility to consider carefully the level of resources that they allocate to trusts in their areas? Although we rightly try to switch resources from secondary to primary care, and succeed in bringing down waiting lists, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is crucial that health authorities do not forget the pressing need to ensure that we deliver a first-class emergency and intensive care service?

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree. An important conclusion that I hope health authorities and others in the health service will draw from the document that we are publishing today, is that health authorities need to address directly, within their local areas, the balance between acute services and primary care services, mental health services and other aspects of the NHS. Within the acute services, they must also address the balance between elective and emergency care.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): The Secretary of State's response to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said about the financial crisis that, because of management incompetence, faces south Manchester, was completely inadequate. Will he intervene today to stop the closure of 64 beds in south Manchester, and ensure that the inquiry set up by the regional health authority is made public? Will he belatedly agree to meet me to discuss bed occupancy and health care as a whole in south Manchester, to ensure that my constituents do not suffer because of the incompetence of the management over the past nine months?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman talks about my belatedly agreeing to meet him, but he and I know that we have met once to discuss the position in Manchester. As for the changed structure of service within the city, when the hon. Gentleman reads the Geldard case report, he will clearly see the emphasis that the inquiry team places on the need for a quick resolution of the difficult issues—I do not deny that they are difficult—surrounding neurosurgery and paediatric services in Manchester. I hope that he will agree to support those necessary changes. Of course my office is open to him—as it was last time.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. We are now going to move on.

BILLS PRESENTED

Prevention of Breast Cancer

Ms Mildred Gordon, supported by Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Keith Vaz, Mrs. Helen Jackson and Mrs. Bridget Prentice, presented a Bill to enable women over the age of 65 years to have routine checks, including mammography, for breast cancer: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 12 July and to be printed. [Bill 76.]

Adoption Leave Arrangements

Mrs. Helen Jackson, supported by Ms Tessa Jowell, Ms Ann Coffey, Ms Jean Corston, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Ms Angela Eagle, Ms Janet Anderson, Mrs. Bridget Prentice and Ms Joan Walley, presented a Bill to permit the Secretary of State by order to confer rights on adoptive parents in relation to employment similar to those enjoyed by parents whose children are born to them; to make provision for adoptive parents to have the right to return to work during the adoption period laid down; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 26 April and to be printed. [Bill 77.]

Stalking

5 pm

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a new criminal offence of stalking and for a prohibitory order with criminal sanctions against stalking; and for related purposes.

I am grateful for this opportunity to raise an issue of importance to women in the week of International Women's Day. There has been much publicity this week about Tracey Sant, who suffered a three-year hate campaign of a former colleague Anthony Burstow. The details almost defy credibility. Burstow's unpleasant activities included sending Miss Sant a soiled sanitary towel, stealing her underwear from a washing line, pouring solvent over her car and writing her sinister notes—all because when Miss Sant decided to end their friendship, Burstow refused to accept it. He embarked on an excessive campaign that has left an indelible mark on her health and life. Earlier this week, Reading Crown court gaoled him for three years for inflicting psychological grievous bodily harm.

That was the first case of a stalker being convicted of grievous bodily harm, but it took five days of tortuous legal wrangling before the court was able to reach a decision. The reason is simple: the law is inadequate to deal with the problem. That is why the police sergeant involved in the case has called for action to make it easier to prosecute stalkers.

The Police Federation has also come out in favour of a specific crime of stalking. The editorial in *Police* last month revealed that the police annual conference will call on the Government to introduce laws to combat such criminal harassment. As it pointed out:

"it is frightening enough knowing your every move is being watched, that you are being followed. But what if you are being trailed day after day, bombarded with unwanted letters, flowers and gifts, plagued with telephone calls and even go to collect your child from school to find a stranger has beaten you to it. It can ruin your life and that is what is happening now to ordinary people, mainly women."

Vanessa Kennedy, a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice), was subjected to an eight-year ordeal that she describes as psychological torture. She still lives in fear of the man who has forced her to change her identity, destroyed her family and driven her to move house. She has attempted to commit suicide four times. Vanessa claims that Laurence Hammond threatened to cut her into pieces and make her pay for her rejection of him. He would describe in detail how he would torture her and other women; the images were terrible, and still give her nightmares.

Those who describe stalking as merely a nuisance should try speaking to a victim. They are mistaken if they think that just celebrities and members of the royal family suffer. The stories of ordinary women's lives that are devastated by the actions of obsessive former partners, or sometimes complete strangers, go largely unreported. Only victims who can afford to or who are entitled to legal aid can resort to civil law. Even then, an injunction is often not worth the paper on which it is written.

When ordinary victims turn to the police for help, the police are sympathetic, but tell them that, other than giving them a mobile phone, possibly installing a panic

button in their home and driving past their house every so often, there is very little that they can do. Stalkers know that; when they are convicted of offences such as breach of the peace and making nuisance telephone calls, they learn to restrict their behaviour, keeping just within the law.

The unwanted attention can go on for months, even years. Some victims close to breakdown have felt that the only way in which to escape their stalker is to flee abroad. Others, their lives in tatters, can only pray that their tormentor will tire and move on, or be imprisoned for another offence. While the targets of obsession go on suffering, police officers throughout Britain are frustrated and angry about the absence of a specific offence of stalking.

During the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, an amendment that would have introduced a new offence of stalking, which was supported by Labour members of the Committee, was voted down by the Government. At the time, we deplored the Government's failure to take the opportunity to provide protection for women who are subjected to obsessive and frightening harassment.

British women who have been stalked are frustrated by the inadequacy of British law. In the words of one:

"You get to the stage where you think the only way the police will take action is if he sticks a knife in you".

It is time that Britain followed the example of Canada, America and Australia, where stalking is a crime.

The National Anti-Stalking and Harassment Campaign recently submitted detailed proposals to the Home Office that would give greater protection to victims of stalking. If stalkers are not stopped, they can go on to assault the object of their obsession; in extreme cases, they may commit rape, and they may even commit murder, with which the family of Catherine Ayling is still struggling to come to terms. We must have new legislation to put an end to such a travesty of justice, which destroys the lives of many women. Stalking must be made a crime.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Janet Anderson, Ms Tessa Jowell, Mrs. Bridget Prentice, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Ms Ann Coffey, Mrs. Margaret Hodge, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Ms Jean Corston, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mr. Don Touhig, Mrs. Anne Campbell and Mrs. Maria Fyfe.

STALKING

Ms Janet Anderson accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for a new criminal offence of stalking and for a prohibitory order with criminal sanctions against stalking; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 29 March and to be printed. [Bill 78.]

Orders of the Day

Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill
[Lords]

Order for Second Reading read.

5.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I hope that the House will allow me first to speak as the hon. Member for Battersea and to pay tribute to my predecessor but one, whose death has been announced today. Douglas Jay, more recently known as Lord Jay, represented my constituency—or most of it—for almost 40 years. Tributes will no doubt be paid for his work in government on other occasions, but today I should like to represent my constituents in saying that I know that he was held in great affection and respect in my constituency, and we shall miss him.

One of the principal aims of community care is to enable people to cope with their problems of disability or frailty so that they can remain in their own homes whenever that is feasible and sensible, and they wish to do so. Making that possible is the challenge to families, informal and formal carers, local, private, voluntary and public organisations and agencies.

Today, we are taking a further significant step down the road of responding to people's wishes and enabling them to lead as normal a life as possible. Direct payments are a natural progression in community care towards that aim, giving users more control and more choice. They put the people who need community care services in the driving seat and allow them to make important decisions about how their needs are met. We are adding dignity, independence and choice to care and support, and I believe that we shall have the support of the whole House in speeding the measure towards the statute book.

In line with our policies, local authorities have increasingly been involving the people who use community care in the planning and development of their services. Experience shows that this approach leads to more flexible and more appropriate services. We have also been listening to people who have been asking us to go further. They want to have more control over the money that is spent meeting their needs. Time and again, I have heard from people who have a disability, but also hold down a job or voluntary work and whose working lives are obstructed by the rigidity of a council service rota; or people who do not like to complain, but would really like a different range of menus from the meal service; or people who have responsible jobs, but are treated by the care workers as if they were rather tiresome and untidy children. They have no real independence, no real choice and no real dignity.

The Bill will change that. Local authorities will be able to give people in defined categories cash instead of services. Those people will be able to choose within the available resources how and when the services that they need will be provided. They will be able to decide from whom to buy services, or whom to employ to assist them in leading more independent lives, and they will manage directly the services that they receive.

[Mr. John Bowis]

Members of both Houses do not need me to extol the virtues of direct payments. I pay particular tribute to my noble Friend Lord McColl, who introduced a Bill on this matter in another place, and of course to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), whose Disabled Persons (Service) Bill sought to take us down this road. He and our then hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) have continued to press hard for such a measure, and I am sure that they will both be pleased that we have been able to stride forward for the benefit of disabled people.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): What guidance will the Minister offer to local authorities regarding people who are receiving social benefits to ensure that those benefits are not impinged upon by the provision of direct payments? Does he intend to introduce regulations that will offer guidance on what local authorities can offer with regard to the needs of those requesting community care? Will he offer assistance on the schemes that may be adopted by local authorities?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to refer to a number of matters that I shall mention later. We will produce guidance for local authorities introducing the schemes and for the people who will be seeking to manage their own affairs through direct payments. He also mentioned the benefits system, and any necessary clarification on that will be forthcoming. Our intention is that direct payments should in no way change the situation of someone receiving direct services.

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): The House will welcome what my hon. Friend said about the right of independent living, dignity and choice. Can he assure the House that that will apply also to people aged over 65?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend may know that our consultation on the precise eligibility criteria has just finished. One of the matters that we looked at was whether the eligibility should, in the first instance, be limited to particular categories of people. In so doing, we shall certainly consider whether passing a particular age should exclude a person from the schemes—again, I must say, in the first instance. I shall return to that point, and my hon. Friend may get a clear response later.

I was referring to the twins of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, who were pressing similar measures upon us. They will understand if I add that, even more importantly, the introduction of direct payments has been warmly welcomed by the people who will be most directly affected—particularly by disabled people who may receive payments, and by local authorities that may make payments.

Representatives of both groups were involved in a technical advisory group that helped us think through the issues as we worked out the details of the Bill. We are very grateful for their contribution, and look forward to drawing on their expertise again as we work on the guidance that we intend to produce. I should also like to thank all those who have responded to the consultation exercise on the matters to be covered in both regulations and guidance. It is very important that we get the framework for direct payments right, and we are now carefully considering the responses.

Clauses 1 to 3 apply to England and Wales, while clauses 4 and 5 make corresponding provision for Scotland by adding new sections to the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Clause 6 allows for this legislation to be extended to Northern Ireland by Order in Council using the negative resolution procedure. When the Bill comes into force, its power will be available to local authorities throughout the United Kingdom.

The Bill starts from the local authority's assessment of someone's needs under the existing law on community care. If it appears to the authority that someone may need community care services—whether that is a person to provide care, an adaptation, special equipment or any other service that the authority might provide—it has a duty to assess that person's needs. If it concludes that services are needed, at present it can generally either provide those services itself or purchase them from another agency. Under the provisions of the Bill, the local authority will in certain circumstances also have the option to make a direct payment to enable the individual to buy his own services.

The Bill does not impose on local authorities a duty to offer anyone direct payments instead of services. Local authorities will still have to decide the most appropriate way of meeting an individual's needs, but they will now have a new alternative to offer. Equally, no one will be forced to accept direct payments. People will be free to choose to continue to receive services instead. They could also receive a mixture of both cash and services.

Clause 1 and the Scottish equivalent in clause 4 enable the Secretary of State to specify in regulations which groups of people may receive direct payments. It makes sense to restrict the initial size of the client group for this new and largely untested development. That will enable local authorities to identify and address any initial problems while making direct payments on a limited scale, and the Government will be able to see clearly any adjustments that may be needed to the national framework. The Government think that this approach will give direct payments the greatest chance of being implemented successfully.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The Minister will be aware of the different circumstances that apply north of the border, which is why clauses 4 and 5 are needed. He will also be aware that there are circumstances where, under the 1968 Act, Scottish local authorities can already apply some of the provisions in the Bill. Will he assure us that nothing in the Bill will further restrict the provisions that already apply north of the border?

Mr. Bowis: I shall return to the Scottish measures in a moment.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I understand that physical disability will be the initial criterion used for eligibility. Bearing it in mind that disability does not come in neat packages, can the Minister tell us whether a person who may have learning difficulties in addition to a physical disability will qualify? Clearly, a number of people will not fit neatly into the definition that the Government appear to be offering.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is tempting me to prejudge the results of the consultation, and I will not do so. He is right, however, to suggest that a proposal was set out on which people could put their views, so that we could find out whether it was right or should be extended. It is fair to say that, if the younger physically disabled were to be the first category to benefit from the measure, people in that category with other disabilities or needs would still be eligible because they are eligible under that category. I hope that that is helpful.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Does the Minister acknowledge that it would be discriminatory to exclude large groups of disabled people from the provision? What conceivable reason can there be for denying local authorities the discretion to make direct payments to people over 65, or those with learning disabilities? The Minister is introducing another example of discrimination.

Mr. Bowis: Far from discriminating, we are trying to provide opportunities. It is a question of the pace at which the measure comes in. We must consider the results of the consultation, which has only just been completed. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall be considering the results and, in due course, the proposals linked to the regulations will come back to the House, when we will have an opportunity to study all those matters.

Our consultation paper set out a number of alternatives for specifying the eligible group and asked for views. It explained that the Government are inclined to the view that, in the first instance, eligibility should be limited to adults aged under 65 years, who are physically disabled and able and willing to manage direct payments, with help if necessary. We made it clear that that group would include people with physical disabilities who also had some other form of impairment, which answers the question of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). It would also allow people who have been receiving direct payments before the age of 65 to continue to receive them when they reach that age, and I hope that that answers my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden). There would not be a cut-off once people reached that age.

No final decision has yet been taken on the eligible group. In particular—this has been raised on a number of occasions, not least in another place—we are committed to considering carefully whether all adults under the age of 65 with learning disabilities who are able and willing to manage direct payments, with help if necessary, should be eligible. I hope that that also answers the hon. Member for Wakefield. We have received more than 300 responses to the consultation from throughout the United Kingdom and we are considering what has been said on the question. I look forward to hearing the views of hon. Members, not least in this debate, before reaching a final decision.

Whatever we decide, the reason for selecting an eligible group is to keep direct payments on a manageable scale in the first instance. We are making no assumptions about who might or might not be able to manage. We shall keep the eligible group under review once direct payments are available. Specifying eligibility in regulations will, of course, allow us to adjust it in the light of experience without the need to amend primary legislation.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): How many people are included in the group of those who are immediately to be considered eligible and how many will be left out on grounds of either mental handicap or being over the age of 65?

Mr. Bowis: It is difficult to answer that question, but if one based the calculation on the number of households in which some form of home help is provided for people in the under-65 category who have a physical disability, one would be talking about something like 30,000 households. I think that the figures for learning disability would be around the 4,000 mark. I hope that my hon. Friend will not hold me precisely to those figures. I am giving round figures to give him some idea of the numbers. He will know the overall figures for people with disabilities. One then has to assess the number who would want, and feel able to have, a direct payment, which is more difficult to do. I hope that that helps my hon. Friend.

I shall briefly explain how direct payments will work. Following assessment of need and the person's decision to ask for a direct payment, the local authority will decide how much the direct payment should be. It will not be able to set direct payments at a level that is insufficient to meet a person's assessed needs. Nor should it set direct payments at a level that it knows is less cost-effective than the services that it would otherwise arrange. Equally, it still has a responsibility to ensure value for taxpayers' money. If it costs someone £200 to buy the service that he needs, the local authority cannot arbitrarily decide to give him only £100. If the person could get a perfectly satisfactory service for £200 but prefers a service that costs £300, there is no reason why the local authority should be required to provide the extra £100.

In setting the level of payments, the local authority can also take into account people's financial circumstances. Just as the authority has discretion to charge for its non-residential services, it has discretion to consider whether someone can afford to make a financial contribution to the cost of his care. The authority is not required to do that; it is given the discretion to decide whether, and if so how, to ask someone to make a financial contribution to the cost of his care. The Government intend that people who receive direct payments should be treated no more or less favourably than people who receive services.

The aim of direct payments is to give people more choice and control over services that they would otherwise receive from local authorities, not to replace existing support given by families and communities. We propose to make regulations specifying certain categories of people who may not be paid to provide care using direct payments. That is the purpose of clause 1(4).

The consultation paper proposed that that category should include a spouse, partner or close relative living in the same household. In addition, it proposed that statutory guidance should say that local authorities should not make direct payments where the recipient intends to contract with close relatives who live elsewhere, or other people living in the same household. There would, however, be discretion to make exceptions to the rules set out in that guidance in exceptional circumstances, where there was no suitable alternative.

Clause 1 also contains a power to make regulations to limit the length of time for which direct payments may be used to pay for residential accommodation. That will allow local authorities to make direct payments for respite

[Mr. Bowis]

care, but not for permanent residential care. We suggested the maximum period should be four weeks in any 12-month period and here, too, we are considering the responses.

The final provision under clause 1 enables the local authority to require direct payments to be repaid where it is not satisfied that they have been spent properly.

Clause 2 and its Scottish equivalent in clause 4 remove the possibility that a local authority that makes direct payments might also have to arrange the services unnecessarily, but the local authority will remain the carer of last resort.

Clause 3 is a consequential amendment to include direct payments in the list of social services functions. Importantly, that means that people receiving direct payments will have the same access to the complaints procedures as service users and that the Secretary of State will have the same powers to intervene should a local authority fail to carry out that function properly as he does in other cases. An equivalent clause is not needed for Scotland as the Scottish provisions will form part of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, which already provides for a complaints procedure and other functions—that answers the question of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood).

I am confident that many disabled people who have been asking us to allow them to manage their own care will cope well with the responsibilities of doing so. Some people, however, may benefit from help and support to enable them to do so. The Government intend to issue practice guidance—that is the guidance about which the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) asked—to encourage local authorities to provide support to people who receive direct payments. We are also considering the possibility of producing a guide to managing direct payments for the people who receive them.

The Bill is an imaginative and innovative measure, which has the potential to make a major difference to many people's lives. It will enable people who are on the receiving end of services to take charge and manage their own care. They will be able to decide for themselves, when, how and by whom services should be provided. It has been welcomed by people with disabilities and by local authorities, and I commend it to the House.

5.28 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I thank the Under-Secretary for his most gracious tribute to the late Douglas Jay. We share the hon. Gentleman's sadness. As a former young socialist, I remember Douglas Jay. At one point I actually disagreed with him. He suggested in the Labour journal "Forward" that we should change the name of our party. However, I forgave him later when he joined the Harold Wilson Government and was responsible for an excellent regional policy, from which Scotland as a nation, and many other regions of Great Britain, benefited and which we shall always remember.

I thank the Under-Secretary, too, for the outline that he gave us—not that I necessarily aim to praise him or his policies. However, there is no difference between us over whether there ought to be legislation.

I must suggest to the Under-Secretary that he keep an eye on Ministers in other Departments. Before we begin to consider the issues in this debate, he should watch his back. Just half an hour ago, we found in the Press Gallery a press release issued by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People explaining that there would be much consultation on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. He seems to be concerned that the Under-Secretary, for whom we have enormous regard, will make real strides on disability. In the interests of the hon. Gentleman's reputation, I am worried about that, but I am even more worried about his colleague, who ended his press release, which I have read in the past 25 minutes, by saying:

"The document is also available in braille, on audio tape and in Welsh."

I am delighted to hear that. There are other parts of the United Kingdom that might welcome other versions of what the Government have to say.

The Bill offers the possibility, but thus far only the possibility, of a significant step forward for thousands of disabled people. There are signs that Parliament has come to recognise the importance of the 6.5 million disabled people and 7 million carers. On average, each hon. Member represents about 10,000 constituents in each of those categories. More than one in five of the British population have a direct, personal interest in how we legislate on this subject.

In welcoming the broad principle behind the Bill and laying out the Opposition's criticisms and concerns about some of its aspects, I should recognise the extent of cross-party agreement on disability that we have enjoyed in the House and also its limitations. The Minister was right to pay tribute to those such as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) and hon. Members from other parties who made contributions in the fight for direct payments. They, too, would welcome the behind-the-scenes contribution of the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott). This must be a happy day for him.

It is worth noting that the Labour party has enjoyed broad and effective support from other parties in Great Britain for progressive legislation on disability. It is true that there remain on the Government Benches a number of hon. Members who have supported Labour initiatives on the matter in the past, although the number has diminished with every passing defection from their ranks. That, too, we welcome. That does not mean that the Government and the Opposition are entirely at one on the Bill.

The Government have a record of coming late and reluctantly to recognise the strength of the case that disabled people make for legislative change. We welcome the introduction of this measure unreservedly, but its shortcomings offer further evidence of the Government's less than whole-hearted commitment and explain the frustrations of many disabled people, organisations of and for disabled people, and Jane Campbell, who may be listening to our deliberations and who has made such a wonderful contribution to our achievements on disability.

We and the Government start from opposite principles. We start from the position that it is right to use legislation to end social discrimination against those with mental or physical impairments. They start from the position that legislation should be introduced only when there is no alternative and that it should go no further than the minimum required. That is why the Government have chosen to introduce a good Bill but intend to hamper its

fulfilment by tying it down with bad regulations. To prevent that, we will lay down today the matters in respect of which we believe the Bill can and should be changed.

Disabled people have long campaigned for greater control over the design and delivery of their care. They have argued that they are better placed than anyone else to understand what they need and to choose the levels and nature of personal assistance that will free them from the constraints of disability. They are right. That is why the campaign for direct payments has been supported by Labour, as was demonstrated by our colleagues in another place. We recognise that for direct payments to work, they must have the support and commitment of local authorities. Disabled people's organisations have generally recognised that, too.

The Under-Secretary said something about the historical context in which the Bill has been introduced. It is more than 20 years since the first group of disabled people persuaded their local authority of the merits of giving them direct control over their care by making cash payments. That initiative was followed by the first establishment of a centre for independent living through which disabled people in receipt of cash payments were enabled to provide advice to others who were considering going down the same route. It is eight years since the setting up of the original independent living fund, under which social security resources have been used to assist the growth of disabled people's autonomy and control.

The Government have recognised that the demand for cash payments has outstripped existing legal provision. That is why we have the Bill. Several hundred disabled people benefit from the initiative shown by up to 60 local authorities that have found indirect ways of supporting independent living through third-party agencies. The Minister's colleagues in the House of Lords said that it was not the Government's purpose to make legal such schemes where their legality was in doubt. I regret that Ministers take that approach. I do not know whether the Minister will confirm that approach when he replies.

It is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that their actions are within the law, but it would be a great pity if the opportunity provided by the Bill to assist them in so doing were not taken. I know from the experience of the social work authority that covers my constituency—which, until the end of the month is Strathclyde region's social work department—that much can be done within the limits of existing law to provide cash payment to disabled people able and willing to take responsibility for management of their care. What is true of several social work departments in Scotland is also true of many social service authorities in England and Wales. However, it is not always clear beyond peradventure that such schemes are on a sound legal footing. I hope that that will be clear by the time the House has concluded its consideration of the Bill.

It is six years since the idea of direct payments was first mooted in this place and we welcome the fact that it is now possible to move forward and make that a reality. It is not a heavy parliamentary Session in terms of legislation brought forward by Ministers—we all know the reason for that—but it will not be long before we see the kind of busy parliamentary schedule that follows the election of a new Government. Along with millions of others, I look forward to that day with great anticipation.

In light of that prospect, it is even more important to get the Bill right. It is difficult to envisage another comparable opportunity to address the matter through primary legislation in the immediate future. That is the first requirement that the Bill fails to meet. By saying that they will impose restrictions on the operation of direct payments which will leave the legal status of some existing third-party schemes in doubt—the Minister did not assist us in responding to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe)—Ministers are neglecting their best opportunity to clarify, and thereby strengthen and improve, the law.

Mr. Bowis: It might assist the hon. Gentleman if I confirm at this point that nothing in the Bill will make illegal any scheme that local authorities and their legal advisers have deemed to be sufficiently legal to put into practice. Schemes that are in place now should not be affected. We are not seeking to undermine such schemes; they may continue. Local authorities must always check the legality of schemes with their legal advisers. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that illegal schemes are operating at present.

Mr. Clarke: I am extremely interested in the Minister's comments; we shall study his words very carefully. However, his remarks seem to be somewhat inconsistent with the response that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, who raised the specific issue of people with learning difficulties and those aged over 65.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) asked me whether someone who was young and physically disabled—such a person would qualify under the eligibility criteria on that basis—and who also had a mental illness or some other type of disability or need would be eligible. I said that that person would. It has nothing to do with any current schemes.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention, but he has not addressed the issue of people with learning difficulties and those aged over 65 who benefit at the moment from indirect payments that are paid to them by a third party but whose future is now in doubt because, thus far, the legislation does not spell it out.

That brings us to the central problem with the Government's approach. In the consultation paper that they produced in January, Ministers made clear their preference for limiting eligibility—I shall quote carefully from that paper, as I wish to be fair to the Minister and to the Government—to

> "Adults who are physically disabled (including people with sensory impairments), who are under the age of 65 and are able and willing to manage direct payments (with help if necessary). This does not exclude people with both a physical disability and another condition (such as learning disability). Those aged 65 or over who began to receive direct payments before age 65 could continue to do so after that age".

I shall cease quoting at that point because it is very important to register what the Government have said. The consultation document justifies that preference on the basis that

> "Restricting the size of the eligible group will allow local authorities to test out direct payments on a limited scale, identifying and addressing any problems before the Government considers whether eligibility should be extended to others who are able and willing to manage direct payments".

[Mr. Clarke]

A case can certainly be made for testing direct payments: we recognise the value of a flexible approach there. However, the Government have gone about it in the wrong way. Ministers clearly accept the view that some local authorities are better placed than others to run direct payment schemes as they are already providing cash payments to disabled people through third parties, as I mentioned earlier. That is the basis of the Government's argument for making direct payments discretionary. Under the Bill, local authorities are not obliged to provide direct payments if they do not believe that they are ready and able to do so.

Some disability groups believe that access to direct payments should apply throughout the country and that councils should be under an obligation to make such payments available. We have a good deal of sympathy with that point of view. We believe that the services and the opportunities available to disabled people should not depend on where they happen to live. At the same time, we have listened to local authorities.

Sir Andrew Bowden: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the question whether local authorities should have the discretion to fulfil the wishes of local people. I think that organisations and individuals will bring such strong pressure to bear on local authorities that they will have no choice other than to operate the scheme. There are very influential disabled groups in Brighton in my constituency, and woe betide Brighton council—or any other local authority in the area—if it does not implement the full provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted with the hon. Gentleman's intervention. As I proceed with my speech, he will find that we agree absolutely on that point.

We have listened to local authorities that have said that they want direct payments to be payable at the discretion of the council in question. We have also considered the evidence of a recent national survey—which I believe the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) will welcome—which was conducted for the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People by the Policy Studies Institute. It found that more than 90 per cent. of responding authorities would make direct payments if they were confident that legislation permitted them to do so.

Direct payments are likely to be so successful and efficient that we believe that all local authorities will want to join the system within a very short period. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) will explore, in winding up today for the Opposition and in Committee, what can be done to avoid a patchwork of provision in different parts of the country.

If Ministers are to sustain the case for a discretionary scheme, they must follow the logic of that case to its proper conclusions. They propose to exempt those authorities that are least able to undertake direct payments from any immediate obligation to do so. However, at the same time they are preventing those authorities that are best placed to undertake direct payments from providing them to all those who are able and willing to take them up.

I have already mentioned the Opposition's concern about Ministers' reluctance to take the opportunity to clarify the position of existing third-party schemes—some of whose recipients include people aged over 65 and those with learning disabilities but no physical disability. Associated with that is our concern that the freedom of all local authorities to provide new cash payments will be inhibited by unnecessary exclusions of those aged over 65 and those who are not physically disabled. If it is right that local authorities should have the discretion to decide whether to have schemes and if the professional judgment of local authority social work and social services staff is the right basis for making decisions about individual cases, local authorities should have the discretion to decide whether disabled persons are willing and able to manage their own care and should meet with a positive response.

That view has overwhelming support, which will be borne out by the consultation process when Ministers are ready to publish the findings. For example, the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People said:

"Restricting eligibility is unnecessary and would be contrary to all principles of equality."

The council pointed out the difficulty created for local authorities in making judgments in relation to different kinds of disabilities. It also drew attention to the problem of being obliged to turn down people who are otherwise qualified and capable of receiving direct payments because of an exclusion imposed on the council by central Government regulation.

Equally, local authorities have not welcomed the Government's chosen method of limiting demand on the new schemes. The Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, representing councils responsible for the implementation of this measure, have pressed for the removal of what they regard as tight national constraints. The Disablement Income Group has outstanding experience in this field and has pointed out that one third of its clients of the original independent living fund were over 65. It points out that there is no logic or common sense in using retirement age as a boundary in limiting the right or assessing the ability of someone to make choices and to take control over his or her personal care.

I could go on, but I would have great difficulty in finding anyone—those representing disabled people, local authorities, social service professionals or care providers—who agreed with the Government's approach of blanket exclusions of whole categories of disabled people. This is a serious issue because, in principle, such blanket exclusions amount to discrimination. In practice, they prevent the further development of best practice, place artificial limits on the growth of direct payment schemes and run the risk of creating ludicrous anomalies. I have quoted the Government's preferred option from their consultation paper—which I shall repeat, for the sake of hon. Members who may have doubted that they heard me correctly:

"This does not exclude people with both a physical disability and another condition (such as learning disability)."

I refer to the hypothetical case of three disabled people who are seeking to take advantage of the opportunity to receive direct payments: one meets the medical definition of physical disability; another has learning disabilities; and the third has both physical disabilities and learning disabilities. Under Labour's approach, each person would be assessed on an individual basis and would be eligible to receive direct payments if he or she were found to be able to and willing to manage his or her care.

Under the Government's approach, the individual with a learning disability but with no physical disability would be automatically disqualified from consideration as the Bill now stands. The individual with both physical impairment and learning disability would qualify to be considered. That is surely an anomaly, and one that was never satisfactorily explained in another place or in the Minister's speech today.

Mr. Bowis: There is nothing in the Bill that restricts anything. Regulations will outline how the system should be put in practice to begin with; once the initial implementation has been made effectively, the House will, with the minimum of inconvenience, bring forward regulations to extend it further.

Mr. Clarke: The Minister cannot have it both ways. The Government's consultation document makes it perfectly clear that the Government intend to exclude people with learning difficulties. We have had consultation and we have a Bill, but we have been told absolutely nothing about the Government's views on or responses to the consultation document. I listened to most of the debate in another place and the Government would not give one inch on that issue—the Minister ought to worry that that may be the instruction to him as we proceed with the other stages of the Bill.

Mr. Berry: What would have happened if the Minister had suggested that these provisions should apply to people who have learning disabilities but not to those who have physical disabilities? Is not the obvious answer to that question a reflection of the fact that the Bill, in the light of the proposal that will come forward in regulations, is systematically discriminating against people with learning disabilities—they are being treated like second-class citizens?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend has enormous experience in these matters, and he has got it absolutely right. Until the Government offer us a different explanation of their approach to each individual who is assessed, the Minister will have a great deal to do in the House and in Committee to clarify the issue.

The situation is further complicated by the intention to exclude those who are over 65. However, more anomalies will arise along these lines when the issue of what kind of disability a person has is crossed with the issue of whether the person is over 65 when first seeking a direct payment. No doubt, the Government's proposals will create anomalies and fly in the face of the Government's support for local authority discretion. They have missed the opportunity to have a genuine piloting of the new scheme.

If Ministers are really concerned to limit provision to the capacities of local authorities to meet demand, they should give more, not less, discretion to local authorities. That is precisely what Labour Members argued in the House of Lords. My colleagues in another place made the case against blanket exclusion on principle, and went so far as to offer the Government a compromise position, whereby Ministers could ensure that only those councils most experienced in cash payments could offer them to those with learning disabilities or to those over 65. In that way, the majority of councils would have to live with the Government's blanket exclusions for only a year or two, but those that were already geared up for making direct payments could do so right away if they could satisfy Ministers that they knew what they were doing. That compromise was offered to Ministers in another place, but they were not prepared to take it. I hope the Minister says why his colleagues in another place rejected that compromise and whether he is prepared to accept it or why he is not prepared to do so.

Today, the Minister has been unable to say what conclusions he has reached as a result of the consultation exercise. It is a great pity that this legislation has been rushed and that it began in the wrong place at the wrong time. Members of the House of Lords found themselves considering a Bill without having had sight or knowledge of the results of the consultation with the interested parties—that is totally unacceptable. In spite of the protests of noble Lords, the Government insisted on completing the House of Lords stages of the Bill before the consultation was completed—never mind the findings being published.

Proper parliamentary scrutiny of the measure would have been assisted had the Bill been introduced in the House a week or two from now. That would have allowed the Government to publish their conclusions after consulting interested parties. The House would then have been able to consider the Bill with full knowledge of the relevant facts and the House of Lords could have played its proper role of reviewing the legislation after it had been considered by hon. Members.

Instead, the Bill has completed half its parliamentary consideration and all we know of Ministers' intentions is what their preferred options would be. We do not have firm commitments on the contents of regulations and guidance on which the Bill is heavily based. It appears that their preferred options remain the wrong ones. They are too cautious, too conservative and too unwilling to learn the logic of local authority discretion and to permit different authorities to progress at different speeds, yet they continually talk about choice.

I focused on the blanket exclusions that Ministers intend to put in regulations, but that is not our only problem with the Government's intentions. Ministers want to maintain the distinction between formal and informal care, and we agree. We accept that direct payments must not result in making informal care and support structures provided by family and friends into formal paid employment; few disabled people would want it to work that way. So we recognise that it is important to avoid the danger of disabled people or their carers being locked into such a relationship against their will.

Again, the Government's intentions, as outlined in the consultation paper, go beyond what is necessary to achieve those ends. They propose to place a general prohibition on the employment not just of members of the immediate family within the same household but of all members of the recipient's extended family wherever they live. It makes no sense to treat in-laws or the partners of nieces and nephews in the same way as a husband or wife living in the same house.

The Government's approach to the measure is clear. They have at long last conceded that direct payments work and that the individual life styles of disabled persons and elderly disabled persons can be met by the services that local authorities provide. However, the Bill, which we all welcome, diminishes the impact of direct payments by its approach. It represents a dilution of the measures that the Government promised and excludes people with learning difficulties and those over 65.

[Mr. Clarke]

Happily, the Bill, which I hope will receive a Second Reading tonight, will be considered in Committee where there will be a thorough examination of its contents. In due course, it will return to the House for consideration and, one would assume, Third Reading.

Opposition Members regard as most important the views of disabled people in a pluralist society. In that spirit, I welcome the Bill, but I give the Minister notice that we shall examine everything that is proposed so that we have a true, progressive and forward-looking development of care in the community.

6.3 pm

Sir Nicholas Scott (Chelsea): I thank the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) for his gracious remarks earlier. We understand that it is the duty of the Opposition carefully to examine legislation and other Government proposals, but the hon. Gentleman made quite a meal of his objections today. The vast majority of hon. Members will welcome the Bill, introduced by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), who deserves congratulations. Having been through part of the process some years ago, I suspect that some of the constraints that may be apparent in the present proposals may have come not from his Department, but from another Department on the other side of Whitehall—an experience that I frequently had during my time in office.

I certainly welcome the Bill, and I shall briefly explain to the House why. We may have some reservations about the way in which regulations may put constraints on the operation of the Bill. It will be up to those of us who take a close interest in these matters to keep a careful eye on them. I hope and trust that the scheme proposed in the Bill will expand and develop in future years, as did the independent living fund, which was launched in a modest way and then grew at a tremendous rate over the years of its existence. That may have been a cause for concern in the hearts and minds of those who keep the books, which may have had an impact on the plans of my hon. Friend and his colleagues.

I cannot claim direct responsibility for the ideas contained in the measure, but perhaps I can claim some grandparental responsibility, because the independent living fund was the precursor and the proof that such an approach to cash payments was a feasible way of meeting the needs of disabled people.

It is worth recalling that when we proposed the independent living fund, virtually all the organisations of and for disabled people were hostile to it. The Disablement Income Group was almost alone in supporting it. Pauline Thompson, its director, showed great courage in responding to and rejecting the opposition and complaints of many other organisations. It enabled us to launch the independent living fund and make it a growing success over the years. Other organisations tended to stand aside.

The Disablement Income Group has done a great deal to encourage the spread of third-party schemes, which play an important role. I doubt whether there are any legal problems, because I cannot think that any local authority would have launched such a scheme without taking careful legal advice from its own legal advisers, the town clerk and others. The schemes have not been challenged, so my suspicion is that they will all turn out to be soundly legally based and could provide a pattern for provision under the Bill.

The success of the independent living fund has undoubtedly shown that disabled people can be trusted to use the power given to them by such an approach to control their own lives. Before the independent living fund—and the practice continues in many parts of the country—disabled people had the choice between institutional care and services provided by some local authorities that said, "We shall get you out of bed at 10.30 in the morning and you have to go to bed at 4.30 in the afternoon, as that is the only way we can fit you into our pattern of provision." Disabled people do not want that. They want to be empowered to control their own lives and to make their own choices about their life style and the pattern of their activities. Cash payments have made that possible for thousands of disabled people over the years. I am delighted that the Bill will extend and develop that concept.

By 1993, when the original scheme was replaced, some 23,000 disabled people had benefited from the work of the independent living fund. That in itself is a tribute to its success.

In summary, inadequate statutory provision by local authorities for all those people was replaced, enabling them to make their own choices about their lives. The other important aspect of cash payments and the way in which the independent living fund, third-party schemes and the new schemes will operate is that they are between 30 per cent. and 40 per cent. cheaper than the provision of sometimes inadequate services by local social services departments.

Of course, some disabled people require not only cash to buy services for themselves, but support and guidance on how to deploy the resources with which they have been provided. I was particularly grateful to the Minister for making it clear that the Government will play a part in the provision of that guidance and support. I hope that they will stay in close touch with the Disablement Income Group, which has already produced two excellent documents on how people can purchase packages for personal care. If the Government stay in close touch with that organisation, they will not go far wrong.

The Government produced some advice under the old scheme, and they are prepared to play their part in the new arrangements. Of course, books and pamphlets can help, but I hope that the Government, in addition to such advice and support, will be able to encourage, through local authorities, the development of local support groups of disabled people and their carers. Those groups could develop plans locally, to enable disabled people to make the best possible use of the cash help that they receive through this system, by sharing their experiences and providing advice and help to those who are contemplating accepting cash-based services rather than opting for the pattern of social services provision. They will require help in developing ideas on how to recruit care assistants, how to cope with payroll problems and on the other little detailed matters in relation to employing care assistants, which will enable them to live a full life.

Direct payments have substantial advantages over present provision. As I said, they are cheaper to administer and cheaper for the local authority to provide. I very much hope that schemes that will be supportive of disabled people will develop throughout the voluntary sector.

I rejoice that the Bill has come before the House. I do not mind if I have to limit my rejoicing slightly because of some of the scheme's constraints, as I believe that, as it is developed, it will increasingly become a common pattern across the country.

I should like to put three points to my hon. Friend the Minister. The first is that, where there is real local demand for the service, there ought at least to be a presumption, if not an obligation, that local authorities should have to provide schemes that are cash-based—in addition to or in replacement for the social services schemes that are currently the common pattern.

The second point is that the payments of cash should normally be made directly to disabled people. I accept that that may not always be possible or appropriate, but I believe that the normal pattern should be that payments are made to them. I was slightly worried by the provision in clause 1(4), which

"allows the Secretary of State to specify in regulations categories of people who may not be paid to provide a service using direct payments."

I hope that that was not meant to prohibit a disabled person's relative from receiving cash in order to provide support to him or her. I do not know what categories the Secretary of State or the Minister has in mind, but I should be very disappointed if that prohibition were to include relatives.

Mr. Bowis: The purpose of that provision is to preclude payment for services along the lines mentioned by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), not to preclude people receiving payments on behalf of the individual, if that is what the individual wishes.

Sir Nicholas Scott: We shall need to look carefully at the regulations when they come out, to ensure that they cover that point.

The last point that I should like to make is that the payments of cash to disabled people should, when calculated, provide not only for the actual cost of the provision of care, but for matters such as national insurance, statutory sick pay and insurance, which are necessary for a comprehensive and effective package.

I wish the Bill well and congratulate the Government on introducing it. I hope that, as matters progress, the concerns that I and other hon. Members have expressed about the scheme's future can be answered.

6.14 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I want, first, to thank the Minister for his clearly heartfelt words, which could not have been more felicitously chosen, about the life and passing today of Douglas Jay. For many years, Douglas was my close colleague in this House, and I kept in touch with him after he departed for another place. There are still some right hon. and hon. Members who will remember just how closely at times I worked with him. They will know how very moved I am by his death. I loved his humour and benefited much both from his learning and parliamentary skills. I mourn his passing and will ever cherish his memory.

It is, of course, a pleasure for me to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) in this debate, and I pay warm tribute to the depth of his concern to improve the Bill in ways that disability organisations want to achieve. At the same time, I am delighted to see by his side on the Front Bench our good and hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), in pursuance of his abiding commitment to the cause of extending choice and enhancing the freedom and independence of disabled people.

The intensity and extent of interest in the Bill among disability organisations is demonstrated in all the helpful briefing we have had from them. There should be a word of gratitude also today for organisations which, while they may not have lobbied the House in recent days, were very much involved in the earliest campaigning for direct payments like, for example, the Association of Disabled Professionals, who, five years ago, on 21 March 1991, met the then Secretary of State for Health to press for a nationwide scheme of direct payments. Their concern then, like mine in this debate, was to quicken the pace of progress from paternalism to partnership in addressing the problems and needs of disabled people.

Five years ago, direct payments were being made to disabled people only by a few pioneering local authorities. The fear that they were acting illegally prevented other councils from following suit: in their areas disabled people had to rely for help with personal and domestic tasks on whoever the local authority sent and, as the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) said, at times that best suited the council. The people sent to help would only do what they had been trained to do in the way that they had been trained. Often this did not meet the real needs of the disabled person and was not, therefore, to her or his liking. But it was Hobson's choice. Either they docilely accepted what was organised for them or they were shunted into residential care.

With direct payments the few disabled people who received them were able to employ helpers of their choice at times that suited them and in a way that they wanted. In short, direct payments helped disabled people to regain some control over their own lives. That is why the Community Care (Direct Payments) Bill, which has its origins in that meeting five years ago, has been so widely welcomed by disabled people. Welcome though it is, however, there are three areas in which I hope it will be improved.

First, there is the Government's proposal initially to allow only physically disabled people below the age of 65, including those with sensory impairments, to receive direct payments. That is wrong and I hope the House will insist that people with learning difficulties should be included from the outset. Only to include people with learning difficulties if they also have a physical or sensory impairment, as the Government propose, is hardly logical and will be difficult to justify in practice when dealing with real people in their homes. To distinguish between physically and sensorily disabled people on the one hand and people with learning difficulties on the other means singling out one group for special treatment thus creating a class of favoured disabilities, which is as distasteful to most disabled people as I am sure it will prove unacceptable to this House.

I turn now briefly to the proposed age bar. To exclude people from direct payments if they are over retirement age smacks, some might say reeks, of unfair discrimination. It presumes that chronological age is the main determinant in measuring need; but that is demonstrably untrue. Of course, the truth is that discriminating against elderly disabled

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

people by excluding them from direct payments is about keeping costs down. It has nothing whatever to do with logic or fairness.

Ideally direct payments should be payable to all adults who are able and willing to manage them, with some help if necessary and without age limit. I believe that local authority staff with direct contact with individual disabled people are in the best position to decide who to include in the scheme. Under the terms of the Bill, local authorities are to be allowed to refuse direct payments to any individual providing they act responsibly and reasonably in doing so. But why not let them act responsibly and reasonably in deciding who to include?

The second area for improvement to the Bill relates to the direct payment itself. Two issues arise here. One is that of ensuring that direct payments will in fact buy what the disabled person has been assessed as needing. Leaving aside the question of a contribution from the recipient, the direct payment should cover in full the real cost of securing the agreed service. In the case of an agency providing the service, the payment should allow the agency's staff terms of employment similar to those available to local authority staff. If the payment is used directly to employ a helper, the payment should allow the recipient to fulfil all her or his duties as a good employer.

In assessing how much a service provided by a local authority costs, the authority should ensure that its total cost is calculated. This should include all overheads and supervisory and administrative staff costs. Otherwise the comparison between direct payments and in-house costs relating to individual clients could result in direct payments becoming a means of cheapening the cost and reducing the quality of providing essential services. It is extremely important to safeguard the disabled person against that happening. Also very important is the Government's proposal for local authorities to allow individuals to supplement whatever they receive as a direct payment from their own resources. In all such cases, however, local authorities should not be allowed to reassess what the individual can afford and then demand an increased contribution.

As Ministers know, there is already widespread concern about the failure of some local authorities to understand their legal duties to provide services for disabled people, about which I questioned the Health Secretary on 29 February. My parliamentary question asked him

"if he has now considered the implications to local authorities of the High Court's decision in relation to Gloucestershire county council's refusal to restore care services to over 1,000 disabled people in the county; and if he plans to issue further guidance to local authorities on the effect of section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 following the High Court's decision",

to which the Minister's reply was:

"I have no current plans to issue further guidance on this matter."—[*Official Report*, 29 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. 695.]

That reply was not well received by disability organisations that have been in touch with me since last Thursday and I hope that it will be urgently reviewed by the Secretary of State. Very clearly there is need now for clear further guidance to be issued.

The other issue relating to direct payments is that of means testing. It seems generally accepted by the Government and organisations of disabled people that it will be essential to ensure that local authorities apply the same test of means for direct payments as they would apply for their own services. Allowing different means tests to be applied would enable a local authority to sway the decision of a client, either towards their services or towards a direct payment depending on their political proclivities. This would be manifestly wrong, but I believe it could happen unless, in addition to the guidance which the Government propose under section 7, the Bill's wording in relation to the assessment of a contribution is identical to the wording used in connection with the assessment of a contribution towards local authority services in section 17 of the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983, ("reasonably practical for him to pay").

Finally, the third area for improvement of the Bill relates to who a disabled person can pay to provide the help that she or he needs. At present, the Government want to limit those that can be paid. The idea is to avoid what they describe somewhat euphemistically as creating pressure for informal care to be put on a formal contractual basis—as Baroness Cumberlege expressed it in another place on 15 January. To achieve this the Government intend to exclude all so-called relatives living in the same household.

But I have serious worries concerning lodgers and others and the wording the Government use in referring to people in the same household. As paragraph 24 of the consultation document explained, such people are not to be paid

"unless"

they

"are people who have been specifically recruited to be live-in personal assistants."

This would preclude a person who has someone other than a close relative living in the household—for example, a lodger or friend—from arranging with that person to become her or his helper. The wording suggests that they would have to be hired as a helper and then given accommodation. This is far too restrictive. It would also rule out direct payments to people who take in lodgers whom they subsequently decide to hire as helpers. There would be nothing improper in that and in my view it should be allowed.

In passing I want here to urge that care be taken in deciding who can be classified as a partner. Are gay and lesbian couples to be included? How will disabled people be protected from a local authority that is over-officious or intrusive in determining whether a partner is a partner properly so called? In regard to people not living in the same household, the Government intend to exclude so-called close relatives. The problem with their list is that it includes some who, in the real world, cannot really be termed close. The surviving partner of a stepson is an example. Thus I suggest that the list of "close relatives" should be re-examined and reduced.

It might seem reasonable to exclude anyone who is already providing assistance to a disabled person and for whom extra help is sought from the local authority. But this could exclude people receiving the invalid care allowance and would not be appropriate in all cases. It also raises the issue of how the invalid care allowance will be treated in relation to direct payments, about which so far there has been an ominous silence.

To avoid the difficulty the Government describe as creating pressure for informal care to be put on a formal contractual basis, while also avoiding a hard list of excluded relatives, it might be possible to put the onus of proof on the local authority to show that the person the disabled person sought to pay would provide the requisite care informally. In my view it should be possible, without treating it as an exceptional case as the consultation document proposed, to employ a close relative who is—and will remain—in residence elsewhere. This is particularly important in relation to emergencies. The consultation document sets down in paragraph 3 that disabled people will be expected to make sensible arrangements so that they have adequate cover in an emergency, for example if one of their usual assistants is taken ill.

What more sensible course of action could there be than to ask a relative to stand by for emergencies? The current proposals would preclude payment to the relative in these circumstances—whether living in the same household or elsewhere—and I believe this is unreasonable. The practice of employing family members not living in the same household has worked well with the independent living fund, to which the right hon. Member for Chelsea also referred, and I see no reason why it should not work as well in the case of direct payments.

Indeed, if complications are not to arise, I see it as essential that the same rules should apply to direct payments as to ILF payments. Those then are my concerns and hopes for improvements to this Bill. To sum up, the measure is a welcome advance for disabled people but it needs improving to make the five-year wait for it seem genuinely worth while.

6.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I welcome this day as a combination of absolution and delight—absolution as it was because I insisted on pressing my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley), then Minister for Health, about direct payments during the debates on the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 that she went away and discovered that the several schemes that were already in existence were illegal. The disability organisations have been extraordinarily kind to me in the long wait to re-establish what we all fondly imagined was a model which could be easily copied, and I am pleased about that. I am also delighted because this is a place where banging one's head against a brick wall is an occupational hazard and in my experience it is seldom that the wall comes off worse. I am pleased that on this occasion perseverance has paid off.

I welcome the Bill and I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has worked extremely hard behind the scenes to turn what at one point was a fairly adamant refusal into the Bill that we now have. That is very good.

It is always fascinating to listen to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), who made some kind remarks about me personally. When he represents a single interest as an Opposition spokesman, he is keen to ensure that standards of national uniformity in provision are laid down, but when speaking as a representative of Scotland he is equally anxious to allow local autonomy and discretion. Those two counter currents sometimes get him into a little difficulty.

I believe that the Bill is excellent.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is making an extremely good speech, but will he take some of the blame for the views that he attributes to me when I speak for Scotland since he served at the Scottish Office as a very distinguished civil servant for a long time?

Mr. Rowe: It was an experience that I greatly enjoyed. It taught me a great deal about the pitfalls of devolution, and also the great benefits of being an administrator in a much smaller country than England. One at least gets to know people very much better. So I am ambivalent, too.

I wish to echo what one or two people have said. I also wish to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State to the idea that the Government propose to limit the operation of the scheme partly because they are not quite confident yet that everyone who would be judged eligible for it would be able to manage it. The Government's anxieties are targeted on the wrong people: it is not disabled people who might not be competent at managing their affairs—the real anxiety is that there will be a wide discrepancy between those local authorities which already have considerable experience of running such schemes and those which do not.

Arbitrarily to exclude disabled people from the operation of the Bill in order to address those discrepancies is a serious mistake. It would be much better to require local authorities to put forward a scheme which was an effective way to use the powers in the Bill. Those local authorities which already have experience would automatically be accredited instantly and those which have not would have a chance to learn from other authorities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) suggested, local authorities would be pressured by their local disability organisations to get themselves to the starting line as quickly as possible. I would infinitely prefer that approach to arbitrary categories of exclusion.

It would be a rash Back Bencher and, I suspect, a rash Minister who would suggest that if you, Madam Speaker, were to encounter some disabling accident—one hopes that you will not—you would be incapable of managing your own services. Yet the implication of the Bill is that a person in that situation would be incapable. That is very dangerous.

Mr. Bowis: We should have a special new clause for Madam Speaker.

Mr. Rowe: The question of whether members of the family or the extended family could be paid for delivering care is interesting. My first inclination was that they should be paid. It is a ridiculous thought that one could not employ someone whom one knew well and trusted. I thought of hon. Members who frequently employ their wives or husbands as secretaries or research assistants. That works extremely satisfactorily. But then I read more widely and realised that the objections of the British Medical Association and many others were based on the risk that by making the household wholly dependent on that income, we would run the risk of institutionalising the care of the disabled person in a way that would reduce his or her freedom of action. Those objections have great force.

[Mr. Rowe]

I would resist what in my youth were called tables of kindred and affinity and were printed in the middle pages of the prayer book. During sermons, I used to amuse myself by discovering which relatives were allowed to marry within the family circle. I do not want to see tables of kindred and affinity produced to show who can and cannot be paid for care, but the assurance that has already been given—that discretion will be used—should be generously interpreted when manifestly the right person is employed to provide care.

A number of organisations have asked about respite care. The consultation document appeared to suggest that only four weeks' respite care a year could be provided through direct payments. If keeping people out of expensive residential care would be assisted by more generous provision of respite care, that ought to be allowed. I hope that one consequence of this highly desirable measure will be the creation a new raft of paid caring services, which will drive up standards if—and I say this carefully—those services are subject to proper scrutiny. The opportunity to train and recruit people into demanding but often satisfying work will be greatly strengthened by the Bill, but people choosing whom to employ are more vulnerable even than if they were receiving services direct from the local authority. I am in favour of registering domiciliary care services and having them subject to proper scrutiny.

A number of us have worked hard over a long period to achieve the Bill, which is well timed and most welcome. It is gratifying to hear the arguments that we strove to make being put with such eloquence by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health.

6.41 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am pleased to follow the excellent speech of the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). He would be a welcome addition to the ranks of civil servants we shall need north of the border when we establish a Scottish Parliament. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will consider coming back to Scotland to help in that capacity. Even a majority of 19,600 may not be sacrosanct in the next general election. We heard an excellent speech also—as one would expect—from the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott). Both he and the hon. Member for Mid-Kent have distinguished experience of the subject. As a member of the Committee of Selection, I cannot resist making the observation that both the right hon. Member for Chelsea and the hon. Member for Mid-Kent were, in different ways, making an argument for extending the scope of the Bill. When the Committee of Selection meets to appoint the Standing Committee on the Bill, I will put in a word for both of them as their contributions would be most welcome.

Although I welcome the Bill, it is only a framework and does not create new rights. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have been at pains over many years to use their experience in Parliament to establish more rights for people with disabilities. I am sure that that is the way forward, but the Bill falls short. Nevertheless, it is to be welcomed for making improved provision and it will be put to good use.

When the Bill was published, *Community Care* commented that it was

"a piece of legislation so thin it is virtually transparent".

I hope that it will be improved in Committee, when I am sure that Members will take the opportunity to press the points made in the excellent speech of the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), which set out the main concerns. We shall want to return to those issues in Committee.

All local authorities should consider implementing the provisions of the Bill. As the right hon. Member for Chelsea said, there is no presumption—let alone a legal right—to ensure that that will happen. However, I hope that such a high level of expectation will be built up that all local authorities will get around to providing schemes, even though one appreciates that local authorities are under financial pressure this year and will also be so next year.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West was right to comment that it is a shame that we do not have the advantage of the Government's reactions to the consultation process, to which there were 300 contributions. Those contributions, and the Government's reaction to them, would be of great value. Perhaps the Minister will indicate the time frame for access to the Government's deliberations. If the documents include some that would be of assistance to interested hon. Members—I am not talking about those marked for the Minister's eyes only—perhaps the hon. Gentleman would put copies in the Library. Hon. Members could then benefit from the work of pressure groups, interested parties and other knowledgeable and experienced people.

I have a fetish about negative and affirmative regulations. The main part of the Bill, and most of the arguments that we shall be making, centre on the contents of the regulations. Following the Jopling reforms, it is slightly harder to get a debate on the Floor of the House using the negative procedure. It is not clear to me from the Bill whether the regulations are affirmative. The regulations contain wide and general powers—not just specific regulations limiting the scope of eligibility. One clause contains an all-embracing power for general and related purposes, which always makes me suspicious. Perhaps the Minister will say whether the affirmative procedure applies so that we may have an opportunity to consider the regulations without having to table prayers.

The Minister gave ball park figures for the number of people who will be affected by the measure—30,000 in one category and 4,000 in another. Presumably those figures relate to England and Wales.

Mr. Bowis: Just England.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is helpful to know. That will help us to estimate the number of people who may or may not be affected. We can make some informed guesses about Scotland. The provisions for Scotland in terms of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 will have to be given special consideration in Committee.

I emphasise the importance of effective support services. The hon. Member for Mid-Kent said that people with disabilities are, by and large, perfectly able to look after themselves and that that is right and proper. However, requiring some of them to pick their way through their liabilities and duties as employers without back-up and assistance is something else. The work of the Disablement Income Group is essential to make the Bill work properly.

Even if it cost a little bit of money in pump priming to set up the pilot schemes, to get best practice and to disseminate the results, it would be money well spent. The right hon. Member for Chelsea said—I am sure that he is right—that the Policy Studies Institute survey shows that the scheme, if operated properly, could save money in the long run, but it will take time to get there and it will take money to set it up properly.

Mr. Rowe: The hon. Gentleman is on an important point. Does he agree that any money that is available, whether it is from savings made as a result of the local authority providing direct payments rather than services directly, or whether it is extra money, should be most profitably used by disability organisations rather than by local authorities?

Mr. Kirkwood: I agree with that. I hope that we shall return to that point in substance and at length in Committee.

I am puzzled as to why the Bill—in clause 1(2), I believe—introduces liabilities for local authorities to examine financial circumstances. It puzzles me that the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990—in section 47, I believe—treated the liabilities for local authorities to examine people's financial circumstances differently from this Bill. I do not understand why we are introducing new provisions that were not deemed necessary in 1990. The provisions, which of course give discretion to local authorities, have been working reasonably well. There is an argument about charging and the difficulties that it is creating, but I am puzzled as to why there should be a difference in approach between the 1990 Act and the Bill. There might be a perfectly obvious answer—

Mr. Bowis *rose—*

Mr. Kirkwood: Perhaps one is about to come in my direction.

Mr. Bowis: I do not know whether it is obvious, but the simple answer is that it is merely trying to put on a level playing field those who receive services and those who receive direct payments. The discretionary charge applies to both.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am nervous about that, but I do not want to pursue the point further, as we may have further opportunities to do that. I suspected that that was the answer, but we have to be careful about the way in which it works in practice.

I return to a point that the Minister may not have picked up in my earlier intervention. I am still slightly nervous about this aspect. In Scotland, under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, there are schemes which already permit direct payments. There is still concern there—from anecdotal evidence by people who know more about the detail than I do—that some schemes might fall foul of the regulations.

I listened carefully to the helpful intervention earlier from the Minister, who said, if I understood correctly, that nothing in the Bill will prohibit any legal schemes which currently exist. If that is also true for Scotland, I am content; if it is not, I am worried.

Mr. Bowis: I can make the hon. Gentleman content: the schemes to which he refers—cash payments in emergencies—are not affected by the Bill.

Mr. Kirkwood: In that case, I am happy to sit down. Before doing so, however, I congratulate the Government and hon. Members who have been fighting the good fight. It is a start. I hope that the prediction of the right hon. Member for Chelsea that this is something on which we can build will be borne out in fact.

6.53 pm

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): It was indeed sad news when the House heard that Lord Jay had died. It was my privilege to have known him in my younger days. I know that he gave great service to the House and to the nation. He will also be missed as a member of the House of Lords chess team. Invariably, when I played him, representing the Commons, I lost. He will be missed.

We heard a steady speech, as always, from the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). I find it difficult to disagree with much of what he said, except on one point, on which I must correct him. I can assure him that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) will have a substantial majority at the next election. If he did not, I would be very concerned about my own seat.

Attitudes to the disabled have changed fundamentally during the 25 years that it has been my privilege to serve in the House. The Government deserve considerable credit for the progress they have made in helping to act as a catalyst to bring about those changes. The Bill is another substantial step forward in the right direction. I know that, initially, and perhaps for too long, the Government had reservations, but they have now overcome them, and we can make yet another step forward for the disabled.

It is a fundamental right of disabled people in our country to be able to control their lives in their own way to a maximum degree, as individuals and through their recognised organisations. The House will be interested to know that, in Brighton, there is an influential group known as the Brighton Association of Tenants with Disabilities. It is a strong, effective body, led by a determined and courageous chairman, Max Vaughan. It has fought for many years for disabled people's rights, against anybody who it feels has not been helping and co-operating. I have no doubt that it will greatly welcome and recognise the strengths of the Bill, which will increase choice and increase disabled people's rights.

As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, the Government must clarify, and quickly, the question of eligibility. It is unacceptable to the great majority of hon. Members to restrict the eligibility criteria on the grounds of age or type of disability. A high percentage of disabled people are older people. There must be no age discrimination.

People whose disabilities begin after 65 already feel discriminated against. They are unable to obtain any benefits towards the cost of mobility. They are not able to make claims for financial support from the independent living fund. Many older people who receive community care services find that their local authorities offer less support—either in fewer services, or services to a lower

[Sir Andrew Bowden]

value—for those over 65 than for those under 65. These distinctions are made purely on the basis of age, and that is wrong.

If age discrimination is not eliminated from the Bill, or if the Government do not make a very clear and positive statement before the Bill comes back to the House, I shall find it very difficult, if not impossible, to support it on Third Reading. I hope that the matter can be clarified when the Bill goes into Committee.

I now come to two other important points. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister made it clear that the Government will support and help in every way to establish schemes to advise, assist and help direct payment recipients to buy services. That will be vital for the local authorities that have had no experience of operating such schemes.

That will also be vital for a large number of individuals who will have the basic common sense and experience of life to handle their own finances but who will need detailed help. That is where local authorities will have a very important role to play. I do not ask my hon. Friend to deal with that in great detail in his winding-up speech, because I have no doubt that he will give further details of the scheme in Committee.

I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would clarify a point relating to direct payments. Surely there is no question of such payments being considered capital or income; that would be fundamentally unfair.

Mr. Bowis: I am happy to confirm that, but, if clarification is needed, it will be provided.

Sir Andrew Bowden: I thank my hon. Friend.

Independent living establishes dignity and self-respect. Wherever possible, individuals must have the right to manage their own care services and organise their lives to suit their needs and preferences. I am delighted to support the Bill, and hope to be able to support it on Third Reading as well.

7 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I, too, welcome the Bill—as, I am sure, do most disabled people.

In 1994-95, statistics issued by Scope showed that 72 per cent. of disabled people wanted more independence, and 59 per cent. wanted more control over their everyday lives. Most local authority social services departments also welcome the Bill: most are committed to the principles of empowering users and carers, and offering them maximum flexibility and real choice in respect of the services that they receive. That view has the full support of disabled people, many of whom find dealing with social services a nightmare. That has been particularly true over the past few years, when resources have been scarce, to say the least.

One of my constituents has cared for her severely disabled daughter for more than 30 years. Virtually everything has to be done for the disabled girl: caring for her has been more than a full-time job for her parents. The mother wrote to the social services department in April 1994:

"Dear Mr. Brookes

It gives me no pleasure at all to write to you about this matter.

I remember the first meeting I went to at the Abbey Day Centre on care in the community and for the first time in Karen's life I felt like the future was looking better for carers like myself. After reading carers magazine and hearing that families like mine will have assessments made, I decided to phone for an assessment. All I asked for was that if there was a problem here, I could ask Social Services to provide extra care for Karen from Crossroads . . . Since the third visit from the Social worker Crossroads said they would help me to have a week's holiday so I asked if Social Services would pay so much towards the extra care.

I cannot understand how money appears to be available for services I do not want, but it seems so difficult for a service I do want. I would rather have 2 hours of care that I do want than 10 hours of care that I do not want."

I only hope that the Bill will prevent the repetition of problems such as the one experienced by that frustrated mother.

Paying disabled people money directly, so that they can purchase services themselves, is the ideal way of empowering them. In the past, many social services departments have examined ways of skirting round existing legislation—for instance, voucher or brokerage schemes. As has already been pointed out, at least 60 direct payment schemes are already working successfully in some areas. The Bill, however, will end the legal anomaly that prevents local authorities from making any payment to a third party in connection with the provision of community care.

Although I support the discretion being given to local authorities to decide whether to offer direct payments, and the ability of people to decide whether to manage their own care, I firmly believe that the Government are making a huge error in allowing the Secretary of State to make regulations excluding whole categories of disabled people. In limiting the option of direct payments to those with physical disabilities aged between 18 and 65, the Bill itself becomes discriminatory: it discriminates against those aged 65 and over, and against those with learning difficulties.

As a former headmaster of a school for children with special educational needs and, in particular, learning difficulties, I find it extremely distasteful that the Government appear to be discriminating against an entire section of the community, regardless of individual circumstances. People with learning difficulties should not be excluded automatically; they should be allowed to exercise the direct payment option, if they are able to do so, and should be given all the support they need.

I also think it absurd that people who may need care in the community as much as any other group—those over 65, especially the disabled—are to be disqualified by the regulations. I conclude that the disqualification is based on the fact not that those people cannot understand or decide on their needs, but that such care would cost more money. As always, well-intentioned legislation has been ruined by the Government's failure to provide the necessary funds.

Some schemes that are running successfully now will not be within the terms of the new regulations—for example, schemes that include people over 65 and/or people with learning difficulties. Will such schemes be allowed to continue? I was not sure of the answer earlier in the debate. I am delighted to see that the Minister is nodding, but I hope that that will be made clear in the Bill; it certainly is not clear now.

It would be nonsense not to include such groups, especially as, under the proposed new regulations, local authorities already have discretion to award payments to those who are "able and willing". That in itself gives

enough discretion to authorities, and will ensure that all who can and want to participate will be able to do so. If the Government are not prepared to include those groups in the Bill immediately, as they should, the least they should do is agree to a review of the initial scheme once it is up and running, with the aim of adding other groups as quickly as possible.

I am pleased to learn that individuals may receive a mix of direct payments and services. That will allow increased flexibility in the design of care packages, and may also be important in ensuring that the developing community care market is not destabilised. I fear, however, that the legislation could become a charter for unscrupulous providers. We have seen such developments in some of the private nursing homes that have been set up over the past few years. When an agency or commercial provider is used, it should be one that has been approved or accredited in some way.

A rigid inspection service should also be introduced, either by local authorities or by the Government, to ensure that a high-quality service is provided. I have no doubt that some people will seek to exploit the new system, seeing it as a way of making easy money. The last thing we want is the exploitation of disabled people. Most people in receipt of community care have limited resources, and must be given value for money; monitoring will be necessary to ensure that that money is spent properly. Once money had been spent, it would be almost impossible to recover if it had been spent improperly. Local authorities need the power to keep an eye on things.

I agree in principle that close relatives should not be paid to provide a service. I firmly believe that we all have family responsibilities and obligations, but regulations should allow recipients to purchase services to provide some respite for informal carers, and allow them to recompense neighbours, friends and, in some instances, relatives who provide regular and substantial assistance.

I should like to quote a letter to Crossroads from the same lady whom I quoted earlier. It shows her frustration and difficulties in obtaining respite care for her daughter. It states:

"Dear Ros,

Ref. to your visit regarding assessment of Karen, I cannot go on holiday without writing this letter.

Monday's visit was different and after Tuesday's phone call; when I had time to think about what you had said, when I said I did not want a new lady coming to visit here, you said that if I was hoping for respite care and hoping to have a weekend away for eg., then I would have to see this lady because you could not see the time when Crossroads could provide this care. I hope you realise that at St. Nicholas Church Hall recently when someone told Mr. P. Brookes that caring for someone at home was made more complicated by the system of offering care which consisted of a bit of help here eg. District Nurse, a bit there Dom. Care, a bit from ILF, a bit from Crossroads, and now you say a bit from this lady you know . . . The cost of care for Karen while we are on holiday is a lot of money but 4 years ago I know it was costing £600 a week for someone like Karen to live in a home for the severely disabled. Also this is the first time in her 32 years that help has been given to us so that we can have a holiday knowing Karen is being properly cared for in her own home.

As for what you have offered, forget it, Karen has to have such personal things done to her just to keep her going, she wants continuity in her care, not anybody or everybody."

I hope that that moving letter to Crossroads will end the frustration that people such as that lady feel in failing to obtain proper respite care.

Local authorities should be allowed the discretion to decide bona fide arrangements. They should be allowed the discretion to decide any period of temporary residential or respite care that is needed. To fix a specific number of weeks in one year is inflexible, and does not cover for the unexpected.

My understanding of the Bill is that, if a disabled person wished to use direct payments to employ someone as a care assistant, they would have to take on all an employer's responsibilities. For example, they would have to understand the workings of tax deductions, national insurance, employer liability insurance, and sick pay and holiday pay. That is a formidable task, and could put many disabled people off the scheme.

If my assumptions are correct, surely those people should not have those responsibilities, and a system should be devised to avoid it. If that is not possible, however, it is obvious that a huge amount of support will be needed for someone who has never had to hire or fire before. The Government should make it clear in the regulations how that support will be organised and provided.

As I said, if there is not adequate support, many people may be put off from using the scheme. Consequently, direct payments would be likely to reach only a limited number of people, which is the last thing that we want. Over the years, the Government have produced some reasonable reforms in the special needs sector—I admit that, and have congratulated them on it. I think in particular of special educational needs.

The Government have always failed, however, in that they have never provided the resources to ensure that those reforms were successful. What disturbs me about these proposals is that, unless adequate resources are made available for community care—clearly, they are not at present—the new system could become a cheap and easy option for some local authorities, or lead some to cut services.

Equally, the Bill must not become a means in some sectors of passing responsibility for an underfunded, failing community care system to disabled persons. Inadequate funding could fail the system and do the opposite of what the Bill hopes to achieve. It could threaten disabled people's independence.

As the Government will not make new resources available, that will inevitably restrict the number of people who can take advantage of the new law after it is enacted. The introduction of direct payments may further highlight the existing lack of consumer choice. I am pleased, however, to support the Bill, and I hope that, in Committee, most of the problems and difficulties that are foreseen can be ironed out in a reasonable way.

This is a perfect opportunity for disabled persons to become independent—so that they do not have to rely on the generosity of others—and to be allowed to do what they want, when they want; so let us hope that the House gets it right.

7.14 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I am delighted to support this important Bill, which represents a breakthrough in care for disabled people. I congratulate all the people who, over the years, have campaigned in the House, in the other place and outside on the success

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

of these measures. I congratulate the Disablement Income Group and other lobby groups that have campaigned for so long, the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who has been campaigning for more than six years, and Lord McColl in the other place, who has been pressing for more than three years. I have supported the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) in delegations to the Department of Health to press for these measures.

I congratulate the Minister because he has achieved a Government U-turn and overcome the ideology of the Treasury mandarins. This is an important breakthrough because, in effect, it establishes a decentralisation of the welfare state and allows local authorities to make discretionary cash payments within the constraint of an overall financial budget. We may view it as a model for ways in which the welfare state could develop.

The person who deserves the greatest recognition for his achievement is the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott). The independent living fund was the pioneering achievement and showed how disabled people could manage their care so well. That laid the foundation for the schemes in many local authorities, and for the Bill.

The independent living fund showed how successful such schemes could be. I was amazed at the report entitled "Cashing in on Independence" produced a year or two ago by the Policy Studies Institute. It shows the extent of those benefits. It states:

"The findings indicate that support arrangements financed by direct/indirect payments are, on average, between 30 and 40 per cent. cheaper than equivalent service based support. The average hourly unit cost of support for people receiving payments is £5.18 compared to £8.52 for service users."

That is a massive increase in value for money. I am sorry only that the Government seem to wish to restrict benefits of that magnitude.

Cash benefits are not the only benefits. Others include the increase in control by service users, greater reliability, flexibility and better personal relationships that develop through being able to choose and make decisions. All those are massive benefits, and we should not restrict them.

I am surprised that the Minister seems to have given in to the Treasury mandarins in that respect. There is no purpose in having any restrictions. Let us just scrap them. Why should 65-year-olds be denied those benefits? They have had a lifetime's experience of managing their lives, so surely they can manage care packages as well as anyone. Often, mentally handicapped people need the flexibility of those services. Obviously, their carers would make the decisions for them, but they need those benefits.

I hope that the Minister will reflect further. He has the benefit of the consultation programme. Let us hope that some revelations about that will be made before the Bill's Third Reading because it might help to make his mind up. Not many people will have written in, in response to the consultation paper, to say that they favour the restriction on 65-year-olds. I would not be surprised if there were a 100 per cent. response against that restriction. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) asked if the consultation responses could be placed in the Library. If the Minister did that, we could identify exactly how many felt that we should remove the restrictions.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) has already said that he will reserve his position for Third Reading, and like him, I hope that, by that time, the Government will have changed their mind. I think that everybody should benefit from those massive increases in value for money. What is to be gained in trying to stop that?

We have said that local authorities can have discretion, so let us leave them to act as gatekeepers, not try to second-guess them. The Bill is a challenge for local authorities, and rather than putting on blanket restrictions, the Government should let local authorities use their discretion. Many authorities are running schemes already. Last week, Bolton's director of social services told me that he saw no reason for a restriction affecting people over 65 in Bolton, and I am sure that that is felt throughout the country.

I support the Government's position on the difficult question of relatives as paid carers. In the guidance, there should be a strong presumption against using relatives as paid carers, but I was pleased to hear the Minister say that there would be discretion too. It is important that local authorities should be able to use discretion in individual cases.

I shall mention one interesting constituency case—the difficult care case of Paul Hargreaves, who will be 28 next week, and who is severely mentally and physically handicapped. His care is managed by his 70-year-old mother. In her own words, she is "worn out" by caring for him. Indeed, it is extraordinary that our society relies upon a 70-year-old woman to manage the care of such a severely handicapped young man.

Paul's mother, Norah, had an excellent carer arranged through the independent living fund. She became fond of him, and decided that it would be mutually advantageous if they married. Unfortunately, if they had done so, the independent living fund would immediately have stopped all the payments. That example demonstrates why discretion is needed.

Paul's mother receives £325 a week from the independent living fund, and has a team of three carers who provide nearly 100 hours a week, but no care is provided for Paul during the night. You can imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how difficult it is for a 70-year-old lady to try to cope with her 28-year-old severely handicapped son on her own, without outside help, during the night.

I hope that the Bill will enable the local authority to provide an extra financial care package, so that Paul's mother can buy in care to help during the night as well. She has said how much she appreciates being able to manage the care herself. She much prefers the flexibility of the cash arrangement that she now has, but she still needs to be able to buy rather more care.

I do not wish to go through all the other items in the consultation paper; no doubt they will come up in Committee. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said that he might have some influence on the Committee of Selection, so he might like to include me, if he wants another name to put forward for the Committee.

I do not see why there should be a four-week restriction on respite care. Again, local authorities can be left to make up their minds on such matters. As for support services, local authorities should be encouraged to provide them, and voluntary organisations could also do so.

Indeed, I see no reason why local authorities which provide a support service in their own areas should not offer the service outside their areas too. If a local authority

in one area could not offer a support service, or if an adjacent authority offered an especially good service, it should be easy for the carer or the recipient of the care to organise care through the support service in that neighbouring authority. Such arrangements need not be limited to one's own local authority. Support services can be provided equally well by outside agencies, and there could be a degree of competition.

As for regulation, in Bolton there is now a voluntary regulation scheme. I would be inclined to leave that in place, but obviously if there were substantiated fears that abuses were taking place, we would have to consider statutory regulation. However, care units are often very small, and we should not try to impose too much regulation on them.

In conclusion, I call upon the Government to scrap all the eligibility rules. Let us forget all about them, so we do not have to worry about what is tucked away in the regulations concerning 65-year-olds, and mentally handicapped people, even if it can be demonstrated that they can manage.

I beg the Minister to forget the mandarins behind him and simply to listen to the people. They will tell him clearly enough. Obviously, in some quarters of the Government there has been a grudging acceptance of what they say. On the question of mandatory requirements, I would give local authorities three years, or at the most five, to get to grips with the voluntary and discretionary arrangements now being offered, and then call upon them to operate direct payments on a mandatory basis.

7.24 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): Like everyone else, I start by welcoming the Bill, but I drag hon. Members back a little way by reminding them that we are now passing a law to allow people to do what they have been doing for years anyway. We are talking about direct payments, but they first came into operation in 1981. The first centre for independent living was set up in 1983, and the independent living fund in 1988.

Schemes have been set up all over the country. The councils in Wiltshire, Derbyshire, Avon, Leicestershire, Hampshire and Merton all set up schemes. I am pleased that those councils now support the idea of direct payments, but we must remember that such payments have already been working for a long time.

I have some concerns about the Bill, but in view of the time, and of the fact that some of my hon. Friends want to speak, I shall stick to just a few points. First, I know that the Bill will extend choice for people with disabilities, but I want to extend that choice to everyone with disabilities, not just to a few people in certain categories. Otherwise, we shall be legislating to bring about more discrimination.

The reason for the eligibility argument has much to do with the success of existing direct payment schemes and of the independent living fund itself. The initial estimate was that demand for the fund would not exceed 1,250 people overall, but by 1993 more than 21,000 people were taking advantage of the scheme. The arguments against people over 65 and people with learning disabilities are really the Government saying, "We do not dare open the floodgates." Such an argument causes me, as well as disability organisations and people with disabilities, much concern.

I understand that, nationally, 30 per cent. of all current schemes are designed for people over 65. My local authority, Nottinghamshire, now has 128 schemes in which indirect payments are made, and 78 of them are for people over 65, so more than 50 per cent. of the schemes that operate direct payments through the route of third parties are being run for the benefit of people over 65.

I want those schemes to be not only protected but extended. The people involved with the schemes are happy with them. The social services departments and the local authorities as a whole are happy, and, as is more important, the people with disabilities who receive the services are happy too. Those schemes need to be extended. However, I must admit that it seems strange to see local authorities acting like drug barons or gangsters, and laundering their money through a third person to get it to the person who wants to spend it. To me that seems wrong.

There is plenty of discrimination against people over 65 already—for instance, in terms of social security benefits. I recognise the historical reasons for that, but I hope that, over time, it will be phased out. I do not want us to introduce legislation that causes more discrimination.

I am also concerned that people who have learning disabilities will not be allowed to take part in any scheme. According to the independent living fund, 18 per cent. of its customers are people who have learning disabilities. I have managed to establish that in my authority there are at least six schemes in which people with learning disabilities take part. At the moment, those people make decisions about what council services they want, and I cannot see any reason why they cannot make decisions about direct payments.

In Nottinghamshire, 19 people who are infected with HIV are on schemes. In many respects, direct payments would be ideal for them because the sort of service that they want—some befriending, and a little social care—does not fit easily into the usual mode of local government provision.

All ILF recipients found that the ability to control their personal assistance, and therefore their lives, improved their quality of life. Many of them also said that they would have liked more practical support, especially in the early stages of independent living. It is a shame that the ILF money was not ring-fenced for independent living when it was transferred to local government because it has drifted into councils' general budgets and disappeared. We ought to try to pluck some of that money back out and persuade local authorities to use it to kick-start local organisations into setting up personal assistance support schemes.

Employing people is difficult. As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) said, it involves many tasks such as drawing up job descriptions, advertising, short-listing, interviewing, recruiting, drawing up contracts of employment, sorting out tax and national insurance, setting rates of pay and considering insurance and health and safety. When I became a Member of Parliament, it was a nightmare being an employer for the first time in my life. We therefore need to ensure that people who become employers have the proper support, and not only when someone is first taken on. People will need on-going support because new problems will arise as the disabled user identifies new needs.

[Mr. John Heppell]

It is almost certain that disputes and tension will arise between the employer and the employee, as I suspect anybody who has ever been an employer knows. It is the nature of the relationship. That is fine when one is employing somebody to fix a car, and it is probably okay when one is employing somebody as a secretary, but when the person being employed is relied on to get his employer out of bed in the morning or to dress or feed him, it is understandable that the employer will feel vulnerable without support.

There are already many schemes to provide such support, but, unfortunately, they vary. There are reasons for the variety: local authorities interpret the law differently, different local structures and priorities affect the way in which services operate, the degree to which an active disability or voluntary organisation operates and what relationship it has with the local authority differs, and geographical location is a factor. There are generally more personal assistance support schemes in urban areas and more in the south of the country than the north.

It is important to differentiate, for anybody who might be getting confused, between a personal assistance support scheme and a third-party arrangement. The third-party arrangement acted only as a go-between; a means of laundering the money. It usually took the form of a voluntary organisation, which paid the money directly to the disabled person. No support or other service was provided, apart from the administration of the payment. The personal assistance scheme, in contrast, should provide information, advice and support from the moment that somebody is considering direct payments, and it should continue—sometimes indefinitely.

The Bill might make the need for third-party arrangements unnecessary, but I believe, and I think that people with disabilities know, that if the legislation is to work effectively, personal assistance support schemes are essential. Without such support schemes, we would deny the opportunity of direct payments to the majority of people who would like to take advantage of them.

7.35 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I give the Bill a cautious welcome, because although it reflects a welcome move towards independent living, such a move is not reflected in other elements of Government community care policy. On many occasions, the Minister has heard me express my worry about the way in which in the 1980s the Government spent a huge amount of money expanding institutional care at the expense of domiciliary care. They spent £10 billion on resurrecting institutional care for disabled and elderly people, yet such care was on its way out in the late 1970s.

One can speculate on what might have been achieved with just a small portion of that £10 billion of income support and supplementary benefit payments paid to people in care homes if it had been spent on schemes promoting the idea of independent living. I reinforce the point that the community care changes did not enhance independent living as they ought to have done, for the simple reason that the Government were so involved with the ideology of the privatisation of care and with encouraging the independent sector that they forgot that the independent sector was primarily concerned with institutional care. There has therefore been an in-built incentive to expand institutional care, when the real thrust of community care changes should have been about enhancing independent living.

Nevertheless, I am happy to join hon. Members in commending the Bill, especially the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). As the hon. Gentleman knows, I was in Committee in 1990 when he moved his amendment. I checked today to see whether I opposed it—unfortunately, I did not. I have been caught out previously for thinking several years later, "Perhaps that person was right." I think that the hon. Gentleman knows, however, that I had certain reservations about the amendment. That is because there are certain similarities between what is proposed in the Bill—and what was proposed in his amendment—and the proposed education voucher scheme. It has been a right-wing demand for many years that people should be able to purchase vouchers for services outside the public sector.

As the hon. Member for Mid-Kent knows, I was worried that, alongside the care changes that we were discussing—the introduction of an internal market in the health service—the measure could have been interpreted as yet another push towards the privatisation of welfare provision. I think that he understands that. I probably know him better now as being one of the more sane Conservative Members with whom I have had to deal. I respect the fact that he has persistently pursued the issue, and he deserves some credit for the fact that we are discussing the Bill tonight.

I was converted to the cause not by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent but by a woman whom I met here who was active—I believe that she still is—in the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People. I knew that she was called Rachel, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) reminded me that she was called Rachel Hurst—a formidable campaigner on behalf of people with disabilities. She asked me—I shall not use her exact words for reasons of politeness—whether I could see to my own personal bodily functions. I answered that I had been able to manage that for some years. Her point was: should she not have the right to determine personally who administered such intimate tasks in her case because, as a disabled person, she was reliant on others to perform tasks concerning bodily functions? I certainly could not argue that she did not have that right. Inherent in what we are debating today is the right of people such as Rachel Hurst to take decisions that any one of us would want to take ourselves in similar circumstances. I would like to place on record my personal thanks to that woman for converting me to the cause all those years ago.

Since then, I have had opportunities—certainly during my time as an Opposition Front Bencher—to visit various parts of the country and see a range of schemes offered by independent living. Some, I suspect, might have been deemed illegal had people looked at them in detail, because local authorities made payments in spite of the Government's advice. I do not think that the Government—even this Government—would have objected had they looked at what was achieved by those payments and the way in which they were facilitating in so many people's lives an independence that would not otherwise have existed.

I pay tribute also to the chairman of the British Association of Social Workers, David Brandon, whom some hon. Members know. Along with a small number of people, he has been at the forefront of the campaign for service brokerage, a matter to which my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) and others referred. Service brokerage is the concept whereby a broker acts on behalf of a person wanting to secure services, when that person may not have the capacity to act individually because of learning difficulties and may not have a carer acting on his behalf.

David Brandon introduced me to a lady—whose name I do not remember—who told me that she was the mother of a young woman with Down's syndrome. That young woman spent most of her childhood, adolescence and early adult life in a long-stay mental handicap hospital. Her mother said that, had even a portion of the public resources tied up in her daughter's care at that hospital been made available to secure services within the community, her daughter could have had independent living. That point was well made, and we must encompass within the legislation cases such as that young woman. It is totally wrong to exclude people with Down's syndrome or learning difficulties from the measure, as they should have equal rights to independent living. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree with that.

When I was appointed to the Opposition Front Bench in 1993, the first document for which I was responsible in relation to the Labour party's policy on community care included a commitment for us to look at the idea of service brokerage and direct payments. By then, I was fully committed to the cause, and I listened to people who had seen exactly what that offered. I am happy that the Bill paves the way towards such a system.

I wish to deal briefly with the detail of the Bill. Like other hon. Members, I have certain reservations about one or two aspects, the first of which is the question of eligibility. We cannot sustain discrimination against other groups of disabled people—such as people with learning difficulties and people with a variety of different problems—in the legislation. The principle must apply to people other than those with purely physical disabilities, and most people in the Chamber would accept that.

In an intervention on the Minister, I said that people did not fall into nice and neat categories in relation to disability. Some people, sadly, have elements of mental disability, learning difficulties, mental health problems and occasionally mental illness alongside physical disabilities. We cannot therefore simply categorise, as the Government appear to be attempting. I accept that the consultation document is still being studied, and I hope that the Minister will genuinely reflect on this point in Committee. He is a fair man, and he understands that that is a reasonable point of concern.

In looking at people with learning difficulties, for example, the Committee can also ask questions about the issues of advocacy and brokerage where people may not be able to handle the employment of a carer. Those issues must be examined. I do not like the word "brokerage", but the principle of someone acting for a person in receipt of services should be looked at in Committee. That ties in with a point raised by several hon. Members about enabling people to be good employers. I recall that when I floated the idea of direct payments in our policy document, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said to me—and he could say this—that not all disabled people are particularly nice. I understood his point. Sometimes a person employed by a disabled person may not have a good deal, and I hope that the Minister will listen to suggestions in Committee on that point.

It is wrong to exclude local authority services from the measure, and I do not think that anyone has referred to that in the debate. The Government do not allow local authorities to sell services, but I can think of situations where a positive choice of carer would be someone in the employment of a local authority. It would be wrong for a person who has the ability to obtain direct payments to be excluded from employing the person chosen simply because that person was employed by a local authority. I have perhaps misunderstood the measure, and the Minister may wish to comment, but the Bill excludes the purchase of services from those employed by a local authority, and that needs to be looked at in more detail.

I would also welcome the Minister's thoughts on whether discretionary power is appropriate, a subject to which the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) and others referred. The Audit Commission has produced a report that states that the delivery of community care services across the country is inconsistent in a variety of ways. In my area of West Yorkshire, certain authorities offer certain services, but others do not. Certain authorities charge for some provisions, but others do not. Sometimes, the charges are markedly different in different areas. The discretionary provision in the Bill will add to the inconsistencies, and that is not in the interests of people in receipt of services.

In concluding my detailed comments on the Bill, I wish to encourage the Minister to look at the registration and inspection of available care. The measure will increase the use of individuals providing services in the independent sector. The Minister well knows that there is no provision for the registration or inspection of domiciliary care. I introduced the Registration of Domiciliary Care Agencies Bill three years ago, and the Minister's predecessor—the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo)—told me that the Government accepted the principle of registration and inspection for domiciliary care, but were conducting a review. That review has not been completed, three years later. It would be irresponsible of the House to pass the Bill without including within it proper safeguards to ensure that available care is inspected, registered and of good quality. The provisions will relate to the vulnerable and the isolated, many of whom are wide open to exploitation unless there is proper registration and inspection.

I give the Bill a cautious welcome. I hope that it reflects a change of direction in Government policy towards independent living. If that is so, I hope that there will be other related policy initiatives. The current organisational framework for the delivery of community care is outdated. It reflects a time when there were clear divisions between social care and nursing care. Those divisions no longer exist, yet we still have an organisational framework that reflects that rigid split. That is nonsensical.

There is another bee in my bonnet. I hope that we are about to move towards much more radical alternatives to institutional care along the lines that have been adopted in the Netherlands and in Denmark, where steps have been

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taken to outlaw care homes. It seems demeaning to people to end up in warehousing facilities within institutions. That is an outdated concept.

Let us use the Bill to push ourselves forward to a time when we can say, "Yes, you need specific care, and you can have that care in your own home. If it is not possible to receive it in your home, you will be able to receive it within a homely environment, not an institution." I hope that the Bill marks a new approach. I welcome it with the reservations that I have mentioned. I hope also that the Minister has listened to the concerns that others and I have expressed.

7.51 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The case for direct payments is supported by moral, practical and financial arguments, all of which point in the same direction. The moral argument, however, is the most important. The case for direct payments is most importantly expressed in terms of human dignity, personal freedom and civil rights.

Some hon. Members may have read the study published by Dr. Jenny Morris, entitled "Community Care or Independent Living?", in which in citing one of her case studies, she sets out the view of Maria, who talked to her about direct payments. She said:

"It means I can get up in the morning when I want to, go to bed in the evening when I want to, go out when I want to and lead the kind of life that I want to . . . to not be reliant on my family and friends . . . to keep all that separate (so that) to them I'm me rather than someone who needs help."

There is an ambiguity in the term "care". We like to associate care with cherishing and loving people, and through that giving them the best support that we can. However, care has perhaps too often meant, in practical terms, something that is more akin to being taken care of and to being dealt with as a problem case.

Another of Jenny Morris's interviewees used the word "custodial" to describe the care that she had received. Too often, care has been somewhat too akin to institutionalisation within the community. It is not so with independent living. But if that is made possible through direct payments, services can be fitted to the needs of the individual disabled person rather than his or her needs being accommodated to the needs of the social services authority.

Direct payments are good for the disabled. With the best will in the world, social workers are unable to design packages of care that are as sensitive, flexible and precisely tailored to the needs of individual disabled persons as those that disabled people are able to create for themselves. Inevitably, social workers must juggle with the needs of a range of clients. They must work within the rigidities of bureaucratic life. I make no criticism of them for that. With direct payments, however, all concerned are released from such limitations.

Direct payments make it possible for the demands on families to be eased and for the stresses and burdens to be lightened. They are good for local authorities too, because they enable authorities to use the expensive time of skilled, professional staff to do the jobs that only they can do. It is absurd to have highly trained and qualified staff organising the lives of intelligent people who can do that perfectly well for themselves.

The financial argument reinforces the moral and practical ones. As the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) said, experience tells us that the cost of providing care that is organised by the disabled person personally with direct payments is about 30 to 40 per cent. less than the cost of providing local authority services, because administration overheads are avoided.

That is a great recommendation in itself for direct payments. I hope, however, that the Government will not be tempted to use that factor as an excuse for applying a further squeeze on the resources that are made available to social services departments.

It is emphasised in the 18th paragraph of the consultation document that a local authority shall not arbitrarily decide to make payments that are inadequate. What is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander. After all, year after year the Treasury makes arbitrary decisions that lead to the making of inadequate payments, allowing only inadequate resources to be made available to social services departments. If local authorities are admonished by the Government and told not to behave in that way, I hope that the Government will take that lesson to heart themselves. It is an experience that we speak about with strong feeling in Warwickshire, where many of my constituents have recently experienced drastic increases in charges because of the inadequacy of the resources that are available for social services.

The Bill has been a long time coming, but I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chelsea, who over a long period wanted policy to develop in the direction set in the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman was responsible, of course, for the introduction of the independent living fund in 1988, which was a giant step towards making direct payments available to a wider range of disabled people. I congratulate also the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on his determination to pursue such a policy through a private Member's Bill. I know that the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), has for a long time been thoroughly sympathetic to the objective. I am sure that he is pleased to have been able to carry the day within the Department.

Perhaps it was implicit in the tone in which the Minister spoke earlier that he accepts that the Bill is somewhat restrictive. I believe that it is too restrictive. The consultation document tells us that direct payments are a "new and untested development". That is not so. About 60 local authorities are implementing direct payment schemes through third-party agencies. It is a few years since the directors of social services unanimously resolved that they would like to see legislation introduced to empower social services departments to make direct payments.

It is a shame, therefore, that people with learning difficulties, as it is proposed, should be excluded from the new freedom. That seems peculiarly unnecessary, given the experience of the independent living fund. After all, 18 per cent. of the ILF's clients are people with learning difficulties. They manage very well, provided that they have the advocacy, assistance and support services that the Government themselves envisage. If people with learning difficulties are to be excluded, will people with a history of mental illness be similarly excluded? I ask the Minister to comment on that now or later.

I share the regret that was expressed by several hon. Members, that people over 65 are to be excluded, at least initially. Some 37 per cent. of the beneficiaries of the

original independent living fund were people over the age of 65. The Royal National Institute for the Blind has pointed out that a high proportion of people who are visually impaired are over the age of 65. The blind and the partially sighted will feel that the existing inadequacies of community care are certain to be reinforced by this feature of the new policy. People over 65 are as likely to be fully capable of organising and managing their own budgets for personal care as are people under 25.

There is an irony in the consultation document. Section L states:

"suitability for direct payments should be considered in a non-discriminatory manner for all eligible people requesting them."

However, section B sets out the Government's proposals for discrimination—the exclusion of people with learning difficulties and people over the age of 65. Age Concern has termed that "blatant age discrimination". If the Government consider that Age Concern is biased, perhaps they will heed the Law Commission, which recommended:

"There should be a presumption against lack of capacity".

The Government's timidity is misplaced. There is a great deal of experience around. I hope that they will reflect carefully on the injustice and the dashing of hopes that their policy, as they at present intend it, will cause.

The Government want to give local authorities discretion as to whether they should run direct payment schemes at all. The very existence of that discretion will result in discrimination, which I regret. If the Government are to give local authorities such discretion, surely they do not need to double-bank by taking a discretion unto themselves as well, through the regulation-making power. Surely we do not want to pursue a discriminatory policy. The creation of a double discrimination, through central Government regulations and the scope that will be provided for local authorities to restrict their schemes, is deeply regrettable.

I hope that when the Government have considered the responses to the consultation, including this debate, they will, after all, be willing to espouse option (f) in the consultation paper:

"All adults who are able and willing to manage direct payments (with help if necessary), with no age limit"

should be eligible to be included in the schemes.

If the Government should feel unable to go that far, it is essential that they make it clear, formally and explicitly, that local authorities should not unreasonably refuse to operate direct payment schemes where there is demand for them. Where local authorities operate them, it should also be insisted that they do so according to clearly expressed criteria, consistently, not capriciously, applied. Disabled people need to know where they stand.

Local authorities would welcome guidelines from the Government. While we want experimentation and local innovation, it is essential that minimum national standards should be stipulated. Pauline Thompson—who has been rightly praised by the right hon. Member for Chelsea and who has done so much wonderful work in this field, both as a trustee of the original independent living fund and as director of the Disablement Income Group—has called for a national code of good practice. I hope that the Government will be willing to respond positively to that. I commend the DIG for the handbook that it has produced in timely fashion, entitled, "Facilitating and Supporting Independent Living". I also appreciate the support of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, for the guidance that it has produced to support independent living schemes.

It goes almost without saying, yet needs to be said, that local authorities must have adequate funding. It is their duty to fund the needs that they assess, but it has been a duty too often honoured in the breach. They need to supply the resources to enable disabled people to be employers—and good employers. The costs that need to be met must include the costs of recruitment, PAYE, national insurance, sick pay, holiday pay, insurance costs such as employer's liability insurance, and, in certain instances, redundancy costs. Many people will need to pay the fees of domiciliary care agencies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said that we need to consider the status of domiciliary care agencies carefully. For one thing, the VAT position is anomalous. I understand that there is exemption from VAT where an element of medically qualified supervision is associated with a domiciliary care agency, but not otherwise. All agencies should be exempted from VAT, provided that they are registered in a national scheme, such as that proposed by my hon. Friend, and subject to proper inspection.

Among the other costs that will need to be supported by local authorities are those of training, advice and advocacy. Local authorities will do well to give their support to user-led voluntary organisations, which will be especially cost-effective, because they have crucial insight into the needs of disabled people. They make it possible for disabled people to share experience and expertise, and to pool overheads such as payroll costs.

I hope that local authorities will give support at a suitably early stage. Paragraph 6 of the consultation document states:

"The Bill starts from the point where, following an assessment".

If we start to provide support only following an assessment, it will be too late. From the moment an assessment is contemplated, the question whether it would be appropriate for a disabled person to use direct payments should be under active consideration. I should not need to stress, but it may be worth so doing, that disabled people must be fully involved in the assessment of need, because nobody understands their needs better than they do.

I welcome the Government's proposal to permit direct payments to be used to pay for the costs of aids and adaptations. That is an encouraging flexibility, but disabled people need expert advice on that especially. It can involve much bafflement and the waste of a great deal of money. In everyone's interest, it is important that competent, expert advice should be available to disabled people locally. I ask the Minister to assure the House that the provision will not restrict the existing entitlement to aids and adaptations for which there is no charge.

I was puzzled that the consultation document proposes that direct payments should be usable for a maximum of only four weeks' respite care in a 12-month period. I do not understand the basis for that arbitrary figure. I think that judgments should be made case by case, as the amount of respite that may be needed will vary greatly between households. Respite care is an excellent investment: it enables people to remain in their own

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homes or allows carers to continue to provide care for longer periods. That is highly desirable in itself, as well as cost-effective.

I hope that the Government will not give with one hand and take away with the other when it comes to charging. The charging regime across the country is riddled with inconsistencies and inequities. We must have some national guidance in order to establish a more acceptable pattern and achieve greater consistency and fairness in that field. I note that the Government intend to dock direct payments by removing charges before the payments reach disabled people. I believe that that is discriminatory and I hope that the Government will reconsider their decision. Why should the Government take from disabled people the resources that enable them to meet community care charges, rather than allowing them to act for themselves, as others do? In any case, disabled people should have the power to negotiate the appropriate level of charging. They may need to hold a valid discussion with social services authorities on the subject.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the restrictions that are imposed on members of a disabled person's family who may qualify for payment through a direct payment scheme. It is impossible, as well as undesirable, for the state to shoulder responsibility for the vast effort that goes into informal care. There are some 6 million carers in our society and the state should not intrude upon care that is willingly and lovingly given by relatives and friends. However, we take too much for granted that extensive devotion and care.

Very tight restrictions govern the invalid care allowance, and £32.25 per week is a meagre allocation. While the Government are considering policy in this field, I hope that they will examine support for carers. The principle that the state should, in appropriate circumstances, subsidise family members who care for a disabled person is already established through the existence of the invalid carers allowance.

The list of exclusions in the consultation document as to family members' eligibility to receive payment is strangely arbitrary—for example, a niece or a cousin is not precluded. The guidelines are too rigid—although the Government acknowledge that flexibility may be needed in rural areas, such as my constituency, where it is not easy to find people outside families who are available and capable of assuming a caring role. It would be very unfortunate to preclude payments to family members in areas such as south Warwickshire. I hope that the Government's intentions in that area will be interpreted much more generously.

The Government do not need to fear that there will be an enormous explosion in the amount that is spent supporting family members who are also carers. Many disabled people would love to be less dependent and to feel less of a burden upon their families. They often wish not to employ family members but, where they do, we must recognise that that can be extremely cost-effective.

The Government are proposing two different sets of rules. The consultation document sets out the limitations on the employment of family members under direct payment schemes. However, there is a rather more generous system with the independent living fund. I suggest that it would be sensible to have common criteria for both schemes—not least because a not inconsiderable number of disabled people will receive funding from both sources. I hope that, in making a cost-benefit analysis of their proposals, the Government will recognise that, by supporting family carers, they may give disabled people the opportunity to work and to contribute to the economy.

That leads me to the question of means testing. I am sorry that the Government intend to require local authorities to provide direct payments on a means-tested basis. We have seen a huge extension of means testing in the welfare state, with many associated difficulties, which were described in the debate yesterday. I fear that, for people who have very high care costs because of severe disablement, but who are capable of joining the labour force and contributing to the economy, means testing could be the pressure that tips them out of the labour market. They may feel that the game is not worth the candle: that they cannot afford to go on earning if they will lose the benefit that allows them to meet the high costs of personal care.

I offer those points in a constructive spirit. I have no desire to crab the Bill, which I welcome very much. I regret that the Government took so long to reconcile themselves to the desirability of direct payments, but I hope that in politics there will always be welcome for the sinner who has repented—even unto crossing the Floor. I hope that the consultation process will prove to be genuine and that the Government will consider carefully, sympathetically and constructively the responses to it. I hope also that, in Committee, the Government will improve their proposed eligibility conditions, move towards a satisfactory national definition of standards and commit themselves to providing funding on an appropriate scale. The Government have accepted the principle of direct payments: it is now important that they implement that principle generously.

8.17 pm

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this well-informed debate. I pay tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House for the interest that they have shown in the direct payment scheme and I congratulate them on their commitment to it. I refer specifically to the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) and the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who have obviously faced an uphill task in persuading their colleagues that that important measure should be enshrined in legislation.

I pay tribute also to the progressive contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who looked beyond the Bill at how to address the future needs of disabled people. My rugby league team recently beat my hon. Friend's team, so I must ensure that I build up my stock and increase my credibility with him over time.

This is a small Bill, but it has considerable potential. I recognise the reasonable manner in which the Minister presented the Bill on Second Reading. As my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, the Opposition recognise that the Bill has shortcomings and is limited in its scope and application. I know that in Committee the Minister will listen to the concerns raised by hon. Members, disability groups and local authorities who want to contribute to the success of the direct payment scheme.

There should be a greater sense of outrage in relation to how disabled people are treated in this country. More Members of Parliament should be present at debates such as this to ensure that disabled people's rights—basic civil rights—are recognised. I am also concerned about the length of time it takes to get things done for disabled people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) said, these schemes exist and work, but we have had to wait a long time for this legislation to come forward and it is still discretionary. Local authorities will pursue the route that has been outlined because it is the proper thing to do and they will base their services on local need, which they are well versed in meeting.

The Government are always over-cautious, defensive and wrong in their attitudes and actions in relation to disability rights. There have been some shameful incidents—for example, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) proposed a private Member's Bill which provided for positive and clear action for people with disabilities, but the Government watered it down. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) said, there are 6 million disabled people in the United Kingdom. We are approaching an election and those people will not forget how the Government treated that private Member's Bill.

People with disabilities are no longer prepared to fight in isolation or in separate groups: they now work together—they will no longer be divided and ruled, as they were in the past. A strong coalition works with disabled people in Bradford. I pay tribute to the disabled people who have travelled here to the various lobbies to ensure that their voice is heard. I also pay tribute to groups that work with people with disabilities. Many hon. Members have paid tribute to the Disablement Income Group and its excellent publication outlining its policy in relation to the Bill.

That group helped the Government to establish the independent living fund. As hon. Members have said, the fund proved conclusively that we are able to empower disabled people to develop their choices and arrangements. By 1993 the fund was making regular cash payments to more than 21,000 people and had an annual budget of £97 million, but that level of spending was going to cause a great deal of concern—and I note that the Chancellor has left the Chamber. That fund showed how disabled people could be empowered to control their lives in a way that would otherwise not have been possible.

Local authorities were looking to be creative in providing cash payments to people, but the law was ambiguous. Legal advice indicated that cash payments were permissible under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, while others were forbidden by the National Assistance Act 1948—there was a great deal of confusion. Lobbying during the passage of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, to which the hon. Member for Mid-Kent referred, ruled those payments to be illegal. It did not help at all. There was understandable frustration and anger because people's problems were not being fixed. Labour Members have said that disabled people want care when they want it and in a way that affects their lives—they need it to be tailored.

All hon. Members agree that direct payments can achieve increased empowerment and improve the quality of life of disabled people. However, there can be problems in the recruitment, selection and suitability of the personal assistants to be employed. There need to be strong support mechanisms for efficient and effective use of the payments. Good-quality and appropriate advice is essential in employment and related matters. We must ensure that support mechanisms are in place. I refer to the meaning of "independent living" as defined by disabled people at a symposium in Finland:

> "Independent living is a process of consciousness raising and empowerment. This process enables disabled persons of all ages and with all types of disabilities to achieve equalisation of opportunities and full participation in all aspects of society. Disabled people must be in control of this process. Meaningful choices must be available in order to exercise control."

That fundamental definition embodies the philosophy that we must adopt. We can no longer say that we want to do things for or to disabled people—they must have the right to choose and to determine, where possible, what can be done with them as opposed to for them or to them.

The Bill gives local authorities discretionary powers to make payments, but there is a concern about the relationship between direct payment and the existing local authority provision. There are also cuts in the local authority budgets—my local authority in Bradford has had successive cuts year after year because of the failure of central Government. This must be looked at when we examine the detail of direct payment as opposed to the provision of the wider service.

The use of the special transitional grant also needs to be examined and a suitable balance must be reached. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Health will look at the problems that have been raised—he has said that he will do so following the consultation—about discrimination in disabilities. People with disabilities have enough problems without there being discrimination in relation to each disability. Ministers need to make up their minds to support the broad spectrum of disabilities. I believe that in Committee we shall iron out many of the problems contained in the Bill. I hope that the Minister will look at the arguments that have been put to him by hon. Members, by local authorities and by disabled groups.

Experienced local authorities can make assessments and they are in a good position to ensure that the test is adequately applied—that the person who is receiving the direct payment can manage it appropriately. I hope that the Minister will take into account the argument about relaxing the exclusions. The Bill appears to be too restrictive in relation to the employment of family members. I understand the proximity argument, but there is potential to look at a wider remit and there should be flexibility in relation to special needs and special circumstances. Experienced local authorities have the credibility and the compassion to deliver the choice of direct payment or the provision of service, whichever is most suitable.

Local authorities must be adequately funded, and this issue cannot be looked at in isolation—we have to look at all the services that local authorities may provide. My local authority is currently having difficulty because it has to increase its charges for social services, much to the annoyance of those who receive them. With the passage of this Bill, there will be an opportunity to soften some of the blows in relation to price increases when we look at tailoring the direct payment.

The Bill is a step in the right direction. We have been congratulating each other on getting the Bill to this stage, but the battle is not over. We must ensure that people with

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disabilities are treated in a proper manner, that they are able to live their lives to the fullest extent and that they have a quality of life that takes them down the employment route with the fullest support from society.

In Bradford an opportunities for life fund has been established for young people with disabilities. It encourages employers to take on people with disabilities and provides supportive mechanisms. It makes a difference to people's lives. I believe that the Bill is a step in the right direction, but there is a long way to go.

8.28 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The Bill has an enticing trailer in its explanatory and financial memorandum. Like all trailers, it picks up the best bits and puts a spin on them in an attempt to make people watch the film. Just as films do not always live up to their trailers, the Bill is disappointing in that it does not live up to the explanatory and financial memorandum, the first paragraph of which states:

"The purpose of the Bill is to enable local authorities to make payments to people to enable them to purchase for themselves community care services which they have been assessed by a local authority as needing."

It sets out the scope of the Bill, which has the support of the House.

Hon. Members have covered the Bill in considerable detail and pressed the Minister on various issues. Even the Minister seemed unsure as to whether the regulations would accommodate their proposals. The pressure has been in one direction, so why is there a problem? The problem is that the Bill is an enabling measure. Enabling measures always worry me. I was on the Standing Committee on the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990, which was also an enabling measure to which regulations have since been attached. The legislation was inadequate because it was always envisaged that regulations would have to be added.

When I speak strongly against enabling measures, I generally point out that Adolf Hitler liked them and that they are advocated by the Militant tendency. I recognise that the Bill does not belong in that category as it is a positive measure which breaks down barriers and opens up possibilities. Even if we have a weak version of the Bill and weak regulations are attached to it, it will represent an advance and we may be able to build on it in future. However, the more concessions we gain, the easier it will be to support the measure on Third Reading instead of regurgitating the concerns which have been expressed today and will be raised in Committee.

The enabling aspects of the Bill require clarification. To whom does it apply? We have been told that 30,000 households may be eligible for assistance under the Bill. Clause 1(1) goes some way towards defining who should be included. Unfortunately, subsection (4) provides for the exclusion of certain categories, such as those over 65, so even the definition of those who are covered by the Bill needs clarification.

The definition in the Bill is taken from section 47(2) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 whereby a local authority can make an assessment of someone if

"it appears to a local authority that he is a disabled person".

There is an argument about who may appear to be a disabled person and whether we should strengthen the provision to extend the potential take-up of the Bill.

That has been a common problem in the discussion of disabled people in debates on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in 1995 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill would have affected some 6.5 million people, but the Government never told us how many people would be covered by the Disability Discrimination Act. We may be in danger of being in the same position here. A wider definition would be appropriate.

The current definition of those who appear to a local authority to be disabled persons is qualified under subsection (1)(b) which relates to those who are specified under regulations made by the Secretary of State. The measure is shot through with provisions relating to regulations, but we have yet to find out what those regulations will contain. That is unfortunate. As we debate measures, we should have a clear understanding of the areas that are covered before those measures become law. We have only a creeping understanding of the Bill. We can only hope that the Minister will respond to pressure and extend its scope. We need more precision and understanding. "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" refers to clearly defined areas of doubt and uncertainty. Any clearly defined area would be helpful in our consideration of the Bill.

As has been pointed out, the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People referred to the take-up of direct payments and stated that 60 per cent. of councils operate the system, albeit indirectly, and 90 per cent. have promised to do so when the Bill is enacted.

One crucial word will be debated extensively in Committee. That is the permissive term "may" which is used instead of the definite term "shall". Despite the pressures from local organisations, that permissive provision remains inadequate as the direct payments system could operate readily and well in some parts of the country while in other areas disabled people may be unable to exercise their rights. We must tackle that potential inequity.

A permissive right may cause difficulties for local authorities. If their accountants work out that administering direct payments instead of providing the services results in a net loss, local authorities will be under pressure not to pick up the permissive provision. They will have to measure the financial consequences against pressure from organisations for disabled people. Obviously that would not apply if local authorities were given sufficient resources. We should help to remove that choice.

Subsection (4) allows for the exclusion of certain categories. Hon. Members have referred to those who are over 65. One of my constituents contributed evidence to the consultation document. His concerns are at the other end of the scale. He has an 11-year-old daughter who will eventually be eligible for direct payments. He is concerned about her future. What he said would have made an excellent speech today—probably better than mine—to illustrate the difficulties that must be addressed in the Bill.

I am concerned about the exclusion of those over 65, and about access to direct payments by future generations of disabled people. I am particularly

concerned about the problems of those who suffer from learning difficulties. I understand that there is an additional problem in that the Bill does not contain the same provisions as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which provided for people with learning difficulties to have the details of its provisions presented in an accessible fashion.

Many other aspects of the Bill need to be clarified and enhanced. In the other place, Baroness Cumberlege gave details on Third Reading of a host of matters that she promised would be taken up in some way—for example, the idea that reports should be presented to Parliament every three years after enactment and that support in the form of guidance be given to recipients of the direct payments so that they can handle their responsibilities as employers, an important matter that has been dealt with at great length. A number of other topics will also be the subject of guidance. Reports, guidance provisions and details of eligibility, which Baroness Cumberlege mentioned, are matters that we, as serious legislators, should ensure are in the Bill so that solid decisions can be made.

The trailer to the Bill, as I described the explanatory and financial memorandum, contains other items of fascination. Towards the end of the trailer we are told that the financial effects of the Bill

"will be implemented within existing resources."

The problem is that the Government are rather good at passing legislation that imposes responsibilities on local authorities without supplying authorities with the resources that they need to fulfil their obligations. That has certainly been the case with community care and it is a key issue in this instance. Adequate ring-fenced funding that is properly provided in, for example, standard spending assessments is something that needs to be tackled.

At the end of the explanatory and financial memorandum is a paragraph headed, "Effect of the Bill on public service manpower". Interestingly, it states:

"It is expected that any effects will be small."

It seems that the Government are anticipating that this is, finally, a small mouse of a measure and will not be picked up and run with to the extent that it should be. I hope that we can change some aspects of the Bill so that a fresh trailer has to be presented in order that the measure can be sold, although I accept that it contains some positive provisions.

No Northern Ireland Members of Parliament are here tonight—they have other things on their minds at the moment—but I know that there is considerable concern in Northern Ireland across all political parties about the rights of disabled people. Indeed, among the sponsors of my Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in 1995 were members of four different political parties from Northern Ireland, and various Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) (Northern Ireland) Bills have been produced.

The Bill, however, excludes Northern Ireland. The only part of the Bill that refers to Northern Ireland is clause 6 which states that an Order in Council will be laid. Although Northern Ireland was not initially included in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—or perhaps only in the same terms as in this Bill—the strength of feeling in Northern Ireland was such that that situation was changed and new provisions relating to Northern Ireland were included. A complex addition was made in order that that measure should apply to Northern Ireland—a problem that is usually avoided by the Order in Council provision.

Another of the Bill's inadequacies in respect of Northern Ireland is that whereas the regulations intended to be produced for England, Wales and Scotland are to be introduced under the affirmative procedure so that the House has an opportunity to vote on them, provisions for Northern Ireland are brought in under the negative procedure, presumably because of the complexity of the Order in Council system. That means that there has to be an attempt to force the regulations relating to Northern Ireland to the Floor of the House for debate.

Of the hon. Members who have contributed to this debate, six served on the Committee which debated the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill in 1995 and showed their solid commitment to its principles and the desire to obtain full civil rights for disabled people. One would therefore expect them to advance the provisions of the current Bill so that they become general rights available for all rather than rights restricted by provisions that the Minister will introduce in regulations.

8.45 pm

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): Because of the shortage of time, I shall be as brief as possible. I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words in support of the Bill which proves that, given time, even this Government can produce legislative proposals worthy of support. I do, however, have one major criticism, and join the other hon. Members who have criticised the exclusion of people over the age of 65.

As someone who is over 65, I was disappointed to note that people over that age will be excluded from the Bill's provisions. Given that the majority of disabled people are over 65, this is blatant age discrimination by the Government, which I deplore. Age should not be a criterion for reducing payment to someone who needs to purchase care services. I hope that the Government will rethink their stance on this issue in Committee.

With the qualification about the age limit, I welcome the principle behind the Bill, as it is a significant extension of the rights of disabled persons which will enable them to exercise real control and choice in their lives. The first significant change which I predict will result from giving disabled people this economic power will be a change in the culture of the care service providers as their operation becomes more responsive to the user. That is to be welcomed, as it underlines the important principle that a disabled person can exercise his or her rights and is not merely the recipient of welfare, which, sadly, has been characteristic of some care services in the past.

As the Member of Parliament for Ealing, Southall, I represent a significant Asian population which has a different language and culture and many different needs compared to what in broad terms, is called the white population. I therefore suggest the need for care providers to be sensitive to the needs of that client group and for the councils that regulate the care providers to understand the cultural sensitivity of the population when they receive any complaints or any comments. That leads me to stress that, with the extension of what will become a market in the provision of care services, there must be strict regulation of the care service providers.

[Mr. Piara S. Khabra]

I press the Government to ensure that a properly funded regulatory system is put in place to avoid abuses by crooks or cowboy operators who are out to exploit vulnerable people. That system should be complemented by resources to enable local councils to produce information on the new arrangements so that people who are in need of community care services can choose to purchase those services, if they wish. The information should include the scope of the services available, details of the support services available to disabled persons to help them to use their new rights and details of the period in which applications are expected to be approved.

I make a plea for the guidelines to be drawn up in partnership and consultation with organisations for disabled people so that they are not produced purely by the councils, because some local authorities may be tempted to do that. When a person is unhappy about the help given by the council, there should be an appeals procedure which falls within the ambit of the existing appeal procedures and the ambit of the local government ombudsman on grounds of maladministration.

I turn now to the thorny issue of finance. The new system must not be used as a cover by the Government for a cut in the support that they give to local authorities. Any cost savings to local authorities due to user-operated commissioning procedures will be balanced, in my judgment, by the additional expenditure by local authorities on bureaucracy and support for service users, for which there is currently no financial provision.

Finally, I wish to reiterate my support for the Bill as a significant step forward for the rights of disabled people—which the much trumpeted Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was not—and to ask that its provisions be extended to include people over the age of 65.

8.52 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I pay tribute to the First centre for the disabled which serves the needs of men and women with disabilities in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) and in my constituency. Both of us regularly attend the centre's annual general meeting and we assist by counting the votes in the elections for its office bearers, because we are the only people who attend who do not have a vote.

The First centre for the disabled is so called because it is the first of its kind in Scotland. If there are no such similar places in England, that is a great pity and I suggest that hon. Members visit the centre to see for themselves what excellent provision can be made. The point about the centre, and the reason why I have mentioned it in this debate, is not only that it provides a wealth of activities that may surprise anyone who does not know what can be opened up to the participation of people with disabilities, but that it was planned and campaigned for by people with disabilities in the north of Glasgow. Before they had the centre, they had nowhere to call their own. The centre is a first-class example of what people can do for themselves. It is an eye-opener and I recommend a visit to any hon. Member and a party of his or her disabled constituents. They would be made very welcome and would be inspired.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) raised the question of resources. I hope that the future of the centre is safe, because the City of Glasgow council is facing horrific cuts in its budget as a result of the Government's local government finance policies. For example, many community education centres are facing closure. It would be completely unacceptable if, after the long struggle to create the centre, there was any diminution in the services that it provides. That would be an absolute scandal, because the people whom the centre serves had so little until recently.

We should consider the general history of how this country has treated people with disabilities. For many years, needs were ignored. Then came a better period in which provision was treated as a kindness, and consideration for disabled people was the name of the game. In the past few decades, people with disabilities have campaigned for themselves and that has won dignity for them. Self-determination is the key, not only to the Bill but to any aspects of the lives of people with disabilities. The Bill should provide disabled people with wider choices—choices that we who do not have any disabilities take for granted.

In my constituency, there are a number of elderly Asians and Asians with disabilities. That creates especial difficulties for them which must be addressed by ensuring that they have access to services and that their views and needs are respected. They, too, should have the right of self-determination.

As drafted, the Bill would allow the Secretary of State to limit the groups of people who would be able to participate in the new direct payment services. The Government have stated that they do not intend to include people with learning disabilities at the start. I have read a briefing from Mencap on the subject, which rightly pointed out that it is important that people with learning disabilities have the same opportunities to benefit from the scheme as people with other disabilities. People with learning disabilities, however severe, are often capable of making choices about what they want and with whom they want to be. Obviously, they may need help to identify and manage their options, but unless people with learning disabilities are part of the process from the beginning, the potential problems, benefits and possible adjustments needed can only be guessed at.

Under the Bill, no direct payments will be made to anyone in long-term residential accommodation. That rule might seem sensible, but if it is applied inflexibly, it might inhibit the progress of young disabled people who have hopes of moving into the community and living more independently. They should be given transitional help.

The new system should not serve as a cheap or easy option for some local authorities, especially given their financial constraints, by allowing them to cut their services—particularly in remote areas. The measure should not become a means of passing responsibility for an underfunded, failing community care system to disabled people. They may be unable to manage their budgets due to inadequate funding, which could be extremely demoralising and threaten their independence.

If a disabled person wants to use direct payments to employ a care assistant, he or she should not have to assume responsibility as an employer for tax, national insurance and similar liabilities—but could be allowed to do so if he or she wished. When one considers that some

employers who undertake those responsibilities as a daily task experience difficulty, we should be cautious about imposing them on people who might otherwise never have them. Hon. Members who complete their tax returns will have some idea of the difficulties.

Domiciliary services ought to be of high quality throughout the country, and their users should be treated with dignity, respect and courtesy at all times. There must be mechanisms to ensure that any deficiencies in the standard of care, or abuses of the recipients of that care, are brought to light. Problems should not be hidden away because of developments arising from the Bill.

Clients of domiciliary care are among the most vulnerable members of the population, yet they are currently afforded little protection in their own homes compared with people in residential care. I want a statutory framework of national minimum standards of domiciliary care for elderly and disabled people. I do not mean a rigid list of services that users must accept whether they like it or not; I mean a menu of choice incorporating minimum standards. The Employment Agencies Act 1973 is inadequate for ensuring the standards that we are debating. I agree that the key to the future of domiciliary services is the statutory registration and inspection of private agencies.

9.1 pm

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am glad to return to the House, despite prior engagements, to participate in this debate. I know from a visit with the Minister that he is caring and tries to do his best when he has control over policy. However, having read the briefs and debates in the other place, I believe that he may have problems, because it is not him with whom we have to deal but the Government. I am by nature a person who is suspicious of any authority.

The Bill is welcome to the extent that 72 per cent. of disabled people want more independence. I have said before that language is important, and I often feel that the phrase "disabled people" is wrong. People with disabilities who overcome them are no longer disabled. I have experience of that, because for 14 years before entering the House, I taught children with learning difficulties who faced a physical or intellectual challenge. Fifty-nine per cent. of people with disabilities believe that legislation that gives them cash in their hands to use in a way of their choosing frees them from their disabilities in some respects, so the Bill is welcome.

My noble Friends and Government Members in the other place were concerned that the regulations were not specified. It is odd for a Bill to come before the House when consultation on the relevant regulations has not been completed. Because the Government are so bereft of legislation this year, obviously they had to introduce the Bill before the consultations were completed, which is a back-to-front way of operating. I accept that specific details cannot be put on the face of a Bill, but lots of people are wondering what will come out of the consultation. Will it reflect the wishes of people with disabilities, or will the Government again be guilty—as they have been for 16 years—of asking for opinions but not changing their views? I see the Minister of State, Scottish Office on the Front Bench. He knows what happened over the Local Government (Scotland) Bill, where consultation was completely and utterly ignored and the Government went ahead with their mad scheme anyway. We have experience of a Government who consult and then ignore the wishes that have been expressed. The Bill is welcome, but with that reservation.

Another matter that worries people are the exclusions. I hope that the Minister will take on board the fact that 37 per cent. of the clients of the independent living fund—the only benchmark we have as to how people will spend money that is given to them—are over 65. Yet that group will be excluded from the scope of the Bill. There is some contradiction there. Any consultation should also be based on an historical study. If 37 per cent. of users of the ILF are over 65, surely that shows that they are the people who feel best able to use cash in their hands. They usually have experience of life; sometimes they have a caring partner with experience of management in professional life. Yet they will not have a chance to use the scheme. The Government should think again about that.

I am personally interested in people who have learning disabilities. I do not think that we should always just draw on our own experience and use empiricism. I taught people with learning difficulties for long enough and, as the constituency that I represent is in the same area, I now meet those people as adults. They are quite capable—with the support of family, a community group or local authority staff, or even a voluntary agency—of putting together a life plan. Many people with learning disabilities now leave school with a record of achievement and go on to demand training and a balanced life, and are not just stuck in a corner, as many people once thought they should be. Yet, under the Bill, they will be excluded from use of the new fund.

In the study made by the independent living fund—an historical study worth looking at—18 per cent. of its awards went to people with learning disabilities. So often, we see people who might be said to have learning disabilities, for example, those who are profoundly deaf, yet we see people like Evelyn Glennie, who is a world-renowned percussionist, despite being profoundly deaf. People with cerebral palsy are now able, through the use of modern computers, to write not just diaries but important philosophical works, as Professor Stephen Hawking has proved. When someone overcomes a disability, he or she is no longer disabled. A learning disability can be overcome as well. We have every right to be concerned that that group is to be excluded.

Disability Alliance made a point of sending all of us a brief, which I am sure the Minister received and read with interest, arguing that those categories should not be excluded. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) said earlier that discrimination against groups of people is being written on the face of the Bill. Given the debates that have taken place in the House over the past four or five years, surely the Government should avoid that.

Another category is mental health service users—sadly, a growing category. All of us have experiences in our constituencies of people who require mental health services. Again, we should be worried if there is any question of those people being excluded from cash payments. Disability Alliance could not furnish us with exact figures of where the independent living fund has been made available, so in a sense that is a deficiency in the present independent living fund that could be made good by the Government if they would accept sensible amendments to the Bill. Those two matters concern me.

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

Something that also worries me is the idea that the Government might want to detach a number of people from the communal provision that social services are able to put together. It is being touted as a privatisation issue, when Opposition Members and those who spoke in favour of it would see it as a liberalisation provision.

Constituency experiences involving the independent living fund cause me to worry about whether there is any break with the social services in plans for the use of the cash. One of my constituents, who has looked after a severely ill wife with a debilitating disease, told me that, when he examined his expenditure, he found that 30 per cent. of what he was spending on services from the independent living fund paid agencies' administration fees. He was distressed by that—and, indeed, the idea that people must choose between the social services and agencies must give us all cause for concern.

Given the ethos of his Government over the past 16 years, the Minister will admit that, if there is money around, someone in the private sector will try to make a profit. I should like to think that the regulations will allow arrangements similar to those governing the life plan—the post-school training and education plans—for the young people whom I used to teach. Those arrangements were made with the education authority; subsequently, the plan became the responsibility of the young person concerned. Similarly, those intending to take the cash for community care rather than receiving the service directly should work out a plan with the social services and their carers or support groups.

Charges have been a problem. I hope that the Minister read section D of the brief from the Carers National Association. According to recent research by the association, one in five councils have increased their charges by 10 per cent. or more in the past year, and one in four carers are experiencing hardship as a result of such increases. People have been cancelling services that they need for that reason.

One of the factors that underlie the Government's philosophy is their assumption that authorities will raise 9 per cent. of their income through charges. The Carers National Association, and Opposition Members, fear that people will be driven to take cash in hand because of the expense involved in direct use of local authority services. They will look for a cheaper option, which may be offered by agencies. Despite their slick presentation, the service provided by those agencies may not ultimately match the needs of disabled people.

The association drew attention to a recent report by the National Consumer Council, which examined the way in which authorities across the country were drawing up and administering charging policies. The report concluded that charging guidance from central Government was ambiguous. The Minister should take that on board, and, if possible, clarify the question of charging in the regulations. That would deal with the complaint that the local picture is often very confused.

The report says that, in particular, guidance should be given to people on income support and other means-tested benefits. It is often difficult to make such benefits go far enough and, if cash in hand is provided to meet specific needs, budgets may become mixed up. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) pointed out, budgeting may not be the greatest strength of people with debilitating illnesses or long-term problems, who may be concentrating on their medical care and consequently find themselves in financial trouble. We must also take into account those receiving attendance and disability living allowance. Given the rather frightening signals from the Department of Social Security, which wants to save a further £1 billion, people who think that they are receiving more money may, in fact, suffer from the removal of finance from another part of the social security budget.

I have a naturally suspicious nature, and I have noted the way in which the Government have handled the amounts going to people in need in my constituency. I have also read the briefings. I hope that the Minister will reveal the results of his consultations in Committee, and will tell us then exactly what the regulations will say. If he does not, although a welcome step in the right direction will have been made, we may be walking into the mire in a way that we shall all regret.

9.14 pm

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): For the benefit of the House, I should declare at the outset that I receive research assistance from Unison, although I am not representing its views in this debate.

The debate has been especially well informed and considered, and overwhelmingly consensual, with hon. Members often drawing on local experience and their interface with local disability organisations. We have had on display an array of national talent and expertise on issues affecting disabled people.

In some senses, it is slightly invidious to single out particular Members for attention, but I should like to pay tribute to the hon. Members for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden), for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), and for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), and to my hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) for their long-standing commitment to disabled people's rights. We have had important speeches from those hon. Members, and from all who have spoken.

The Bill has been broadly welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It has been long desired both by disabled people and by the organisations that represent them. We have come a long way since the pioneering work of the early 1980s in Hampshire to encourage independent living among disabled people. That experiment has found an echo throughout the land.

By 1990, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation found that more than 60 per cent. of local authorities were operating some form of direct payments scheme—albeit through third-party agencies—despite the somewhat doubtful legal status both of their establishment and sometimes of their operation. The Bill legalises the direct payments approach, and at last gives official sanction to a new and highly popular form of community care.

The success of the independent living fund is but the most graphic illustration of how an approach that maximises user choice resonates with disabled people. When the ILF was established, it was estimated that only around 300 new awards a year would be made, but, by 1993, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) reminded the House, 22,000 people were receiving payments. The Governments's decision to close the ILF in 1993 flew in the face not only of its popularity, but of its achievements.

A 1994 study for the Policy Studies Institute and for the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People summarised the benefits that flowed from the ILF. It said:

"enabling disabled people to organise their own support arrangements offers considerably more choice, control and flexibility than direct service provision; consequently, direct payments are seen as greatly increasing disabled people's independence."

Tragically, the Government have a history of coming only belatedly to recognise the case of disabled people for improved rights. Organisations such as the Disablement Income Group, the Disability Alliance and the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People have long campaigned for such a Bill. They have received handsome support from organisations as diverse as the Association of Directors of Social Services, housing and local authority associations and many others, including the House of Commons Select Committee on Health.

There is almost universal agreement that direct payments are a positive and innovative development that secures better delivery of community care services. They make the disabled person the centre of the care system rather than its dependant. That point was amply made in a telling contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon.

The first choice of most elderly and disabled people is to live independently in their own homes, and to feel part of the community. For care in the community to succeed, it must enable all people to live with the same respect for their dignity and autonomy. Direct payments allow services to be suited to the needs of the individual, rather than the individual having to suit the needs of the services. In other words, direct payments empower service users by allowing the user to shape the service rather than be shaped by it.

It is not only disabled people who benefit from direct payments. The taxpayer can also be a net gainer. The right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) told us that it is reckoned that direct payments result in average savings of between 30 and 40 per cent. on comparable service provision. When a disabled person is commissioning services it puts him or her in charge, gives real choice and provides cost-effective care.

The principles of the Bill are a matter of political consensus, which I welcome, but its fine print is a subject of real dispute, and the fine print has dominated our debate. In the first place, it is regrettable that the Bill was introduced in another place before the publication of the consultation document outlining in much more detail the Government's thinking on many of the specifics of the Bill.

It is also a matter for regret that the results of the consultation exercise, which finished last month, have still not been made available. Inevitably, the debate has sometimes felt a bit like a shot in the dark, with hon. Members on both sides of the House having to second-guess what is in the minds of Ministers about the final detail of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire rightly called the measure an enabling Bill, and was therefore cautious about it. Similar suspicions were voiced by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty).

I believe that it is not beyond the wit of the Under-Secretary to arrange the consultation exercises and the debates on the Bill so that those who debate it both here and in another place can fully consider the facts. I hope that he can at least give us an assurance tonight that the results of the consultation exercise will be published before the Bill goes into Committee. Otherwise, we shall continue to rehearse backwards and forwards all the arguments we have had over the past few hours, and still be taking a shot in the dark.

It is especially important that the principle of openness applies to the Bill, because, as we know, it is planned to make so many of its detailed provisions by regulation rather than by primary legislation. None the less, several concerns are already clear. They have been flagged up by the disability organisations, by my noble Friends in another place, and by hon. Members on both sides of the House tonight.

The major concern expressed by organisations such as the Law Society, the British Medical Association, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Carers National Association, MIND and the Disability Alliance relates to the artificial restrictions imposed on the categories of people who will be eligible to receive direct payments under the Bill. That concern was made clear by the hon. Members for Bolton, North-East, for Mid-Kent and for Brighton, Kemptown, my hon. Friends the Members for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) and for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris).

The whole point of the Bill is to put disabled people and their needs at the centre of the care system. It is about treating the individual as an individual, regardless of their disability. Instead, the Government seem to be determined to disempower individuals according to the category of disability that they have been placed in by the Secretary of State.

Surely it is entirely incompatible with the whole thrust of the Bill, and with what the Minister said earlier, to deny the choice of receiving direct payments simply because an individual is either too old or too young, or has the wrong sort of disability according to the Secretary of State's arbitrary diktat. We believe that anybody suffering from any disability may be suitable, and should be eligible, for direct payments rather than services. We have much sympathy with those who argue that direct payments should be available in every local authority area to ensure equal access to the benefits that flow from them.

Since direct payments will represent a departure for some authorities, however, we are willing to concede that there should be no mandatory obligation on councils to offer them, providing that two key concerns are met. First, the Minister should actively encourage local authorities to introduce direct payments, and secondly, all classes of disabled people should be allowed access to them.

If we are serious about treating individuals as individuals and about shaping services to meet individual needs, it surely follows that age or disability should form no barrier to qualification for a direct payment. After all, someone who is in their late 60s may be much better qualified to take advantage of a direct payment than someone in their early 30s. Similarly, someone with a moderate learning difficulty may have a greater capacity and willingness to deal with direct payments than someone with a severe physical disability, which leaves them frail, poorly and sometimes confused.

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

The tests for direct payments should be solely about whether the person is in need and has been assessed as requiring community care services and whether direct payments represent value for money for the authority and are in the best interests of the individual who is able and willing to take advantage of them. Those should be the tests—no more and no less.

Instead, the consultation document issued by the Department tries to make the Secretary of State's discretion predominant in determining who will gain access to what we all believe is an innovative and exciting means of putting disabled people at the centre of the care process. Frankly, such arrogance flies in the face of a needs-led approach to the care of disabled people. I hope that the Minister will carefully review the matter, not only in the light of the 300 responses to his consultation document, but because of what he has heard in the debate. A consensus has been established, and I hope that he will listen.

I should like to highlight two issues. First, given that community care services are available to people over the age of 65, an age limit seems especially unnecessary and unfair. More than one third of clients of the former ILF were aged over 60 in any case, and research into current local authority payment schemes shows that only two out of the eight authorities studied explicitly ruled out people over the age of 65.

Similarly, as the ILF has given 18 per cent. of its awards to people with learning disabilities, excluding them from direct payments is equally unfounded. It also contradicts, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon reminded us, the recent Law Commission recommendation that there should be a presumption against lack of capacity.

There remains a real worry—again, I hope the Minister will address this when he winds up—that unless the Government relent and broaden the eligibility criteria, some people will lose the direct payments that they are currently enjoying through third-party agencies. It is surely not the Government's intention to narrow or remove opportunities that disabled people currently enjoy. Yet the eligibility criteria as defined in the consultation document do precisely that.

The Opposition will not accept the undermining of the Bill's purpose by its proposed means of implementation; nor will we accept the denial of real choice entailed in the Government's restriction of direct payments to certain groups of selected people. That is why we will be tabling amendments to the Bill to ensure that real choice is available to as wide a range of disabled people as possible.

We shall also be seeking to broaden choice in other ways. These take several forms. To allow people to make informed decisions about whether they wish to receive direct payments for certain services, it is vital that advice and information is provided to them. Under the Bill, hundreds of disabled people could become employers for the first time. They will need support.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield and for Bradford, South pointed out, the lesson from the independent living fund is that the best-run schemes were on the basis of the advice and support available to the disabled people who had access to the funds. The Bill must ensure that such services are available to disabled people—should they require them—to maximise choices about whether direct payments are an option for them.

Choice should be maximised by ensuring that the distinction that the Government rightly make between formal and informal care is not drawn so tightly that a disabled person is prevented from employing any family member on a paid basis. Of course we do not want informal care to be brought into a cash-for-care arrangement, but we recognise that disabled people will want to employ those they know and trust, particularly when it comes to the performance of intimate tasks for them. In some cases, they may have little choice in any case, because of where they live, their domestic arrangements or the nature of their disability. The consultation document's virtual blanket ban on employing any relative runs against the grain of the needs of those disabled people. We hope that the Minister will concede that the proposals are too prohibitive, and need to be reviewed.

It is vital that choice is not restricted by adverse charging policies. The Bill proposes to treat service users and cash users on an equal basis, so, just as an individual is charged for a service, he will also have to make a financial contribution towards the equivalent direct payment. There can be no argument about that, but we have a number of concerns. I hope that the Minister will be able to clarify that certain social security benefits received by disabled people should be disregarded in calculating the amount of direct payment or financial contribution that an individual is expected to make.

I also hope that the Minister will make it clear that direct payments are to be used for social care services only, and will not be used as a substitute for health service responsibilities. That distinction is vital, since otherwise direct payments received by disabled people will be means-tested even if they have to be used to purchase services that they should be receiving free of charge.

I also hope that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe said, there will be a level playing field between community care services and direct payments in lieu of them, so that no means test is involved if direct payment is made where the equivalent service is provided free. That assurance would be extremely welcome.

Finally—and most fundamentally of all, in my view—the proposal to leave it up to individual local authorities to decide how to take into account service users' financial status when setting the level of direct payment is, frankly, a charter for confusion. The care that a person receives and the price he pays should not depend on where he lives.

Last year, a National Consumer Council report on local authority charging procedures found that charging systems for non-residential social services were structured differently in virtually every local authority area. The NCC found also that widely different criteria were used by local authorities to assess people's ability to pay. It would be tragic if the same situation developed for those receiving direct payments for care. Is it not now time for a national framework for charging policies for social care, to end what has become a lottery?

Disabled people living in Dorset should be entitled to the same financial assessment as disabled people living in Durham. After all, their needs will not differ even if the respective areas are different.

The Bill provides a golden opportunity for the Government to consider ending the restriction on choice that applies to so many community care users merely because there is such latitude in the ways in which local authorities are allowed to charge for services.

The Bill provides an opportunity for the Government to take further action. Although those receiving direct payments may decide to purchase care from a number of sources, the Bill will almost certainly lead to increased use of services provided by independent sector domiciliary care agencies. There should be no objections to that, provided that the services offered to disabled people are of the highest quality and standard.

There lies the nub of what might be a problem. When other care providers are subject to greater registration requirements and inspections, there is still no statutory framework governing the operation of domiciliary care providers, despite the fact that the services they provide are made available in an individual's home, and are therefore subject to much less scrutiny.

The clients of domiciliary care agencies are among the most vulnerable people in the population, yet the protection afforded to them in their own homes is negligible compared with that which is available to clients in residential care. That is why organisations such as the British Medical Association and the Association of Directors of Social Services, in responding to the Bill, have called for the regulation of providers of domiciliary care. Their calls have been echoed this evening by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent and by my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Wakefield. I hope that the Registration of Domiciliary Care Agencies Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, will be considered by the Minister in the light of the Bill before us.

The calls to which I have referred have been repeatedly echoed by Labour Members. I know that these calls have been taken up by many providers in the private sector. Domiciliary care agencies that have taken up these calls recognise that they are providing care for extremely vulnerable people, individuals who have few opportunities to raise concerns about services and who need protection from unscrupulous operators. It is in the interests of us all to drive the cowboys out of the industry. Everyone wants to see that happen.

The Bill brings to a head all the tensions about the lack of a regulatory framework for private domiciliary care. I know that the Minister will say that he has only recently finished consulting on a Government document designed to move things forward, and that it is too early to give any categorical views on what the Government have in store for the future registration and inspection system. However, I believe that it is incumbent upon him to give some assurances this evening that it is at least in his mind to provide a proper form of regulation for domiciliary care. We are dealing with extremely vulnerable people receiving services paid for from the public purse in their homes. Both public money and disabled people deserve proper protection.

The Bill is a great opportunity radically to improve services for disabled people. Our proposals for strengthening its provisions will make the individual's needs ever more the focus of services. It provides a model that can be built upon. All too often, disabled people, and other community care service users, are reduced to a state of artificial dependency by their contact with statutory agencies.

The whole thrust of community care is surely to reverse that process, and ensure that elderly and disabled people or those with mental health problems have their needs addressed in such a way that they are able to participate to the fullest extent possible in the community. It is time that users were given more power to shape their services.

The Bill points the way towards a time when service users will shape the whole plethora of community care services, not only by purchasing for themselves but by defining new standards that will make community care services more user-focused and user-friendly.

The Bill is a good one—we do not argue with that—but it could and should be a lot better. Our proposals seek to strengthen it and give life to the philosophy that underpins it. We believe that disabled people deserve the best and we will do all in our power to ensure that when the Bill has completed its passage, it delivers the very best for this and future generations of disabled people.

9.41 pm

Mr. Bowis: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, this has been a good debate. The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) referred to it as "consensual". I presume that that means that it was a debate between consenting adults, which is probably right. There has been a great deal of agreement about the quality and worth of the measure.

There have been well-deserved tributes to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) as the father of the independent living fund, so "Our Father, who art behind me" is the spirit of the measure, which is in that tradition. The ILF had tighter eligibility criteria than those in the Bill, and was more limited in the scope of the services involved. However, it was the Bill's forerunner, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's work with disabled people, and especially on the ILF.

I gladly accept the universal welcome for the Bill. The debate centred on three things: the regulations, the guidance and the practical support that can be given as the Bill is implemented. In answer to an earlier question, I should say that we are talking about negative resolution procedures at subsequent stages.

The regulations have focused on several issues. The eligibility criteria have been central. The Bill was a response to younger physically disabled people who said that it would greatly enhance their working lives. That is where we started from, and why we have come from that direction. I remember talking to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) when we were considering what to do. He urged us to be cautious and careful, and do it in steps, and we have sought to do that.

Some local authorities have urged us to do it in stages, although there has been great enthusiasm for the all-in-one-go approach in the House tonight. That is why we heard the Kemptown warning, if I may call it that, from my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden): whatever the House agrees to, there will be pressure on local authorities to bring it in as quickly as possible for people who are eligible. It is a question of which stages at what time; where we go and how soon.

When I opened the debate, I said that I was listening, and that I wanted to hear from hon. Members, as we have heard from people responding to our consultation paper.

[Mr. Bowis]

Today, hon. Members have put forward their views about the learning disability extension. We made it clear that we would listen to their views very carefully, as we did in another place. Hon. Members referred to physically disabled people over the age of 65—and not just those who turned 65 having qualified previously. I hear their messages, and we will take them into account, together with all other views.

Hon. Members raised questions about the charging system. I emphasise that the discretionary charging system is exactly the same as that for community care services. There should be no difference between the two systems, and I hope that I have reassured hon. Members in that regard.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Does the Minister accept that we are not really comparing like with like? While we want to see a level playing field in that respect, there is a difference between enabling the users of direct payments to be good employers and to meet that range of costs, and charging them for the services that are provided directly by social services. They are not the same things, and the Minister will not achieve his objective easily.

Mr. Bowis: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I shall return to it at a later stage. It would be quite wrong for someone to be charged for services provided under the discretionary charging system if someone who received the same services through the direct payment scheme were free of those charges. We want to ensure that there is a level playing field.

Reference was made to respite and the four-week period that is mentioned in the consultation paper. We are seeking views about that period, but, whatever figure is chosen, there is nothing to stop local authorities continuing to provide respite care.

Hon. Members have discussed the issue of relatives and lodgers, and there is general agreement that close relatives should be excluded under the legislation. However, there is a question as to where discretion should fall beyond them. I am conscious that we should not seek to pay relatives for emergency provision, as that is something that most relatives would be pleased to provide.

We have discussed guidance and practical support for local authorities and payees, including how to assess payments, how to guide people on legal requirements, guidance to users, and how to employ people. Those issues will be encompassed in guidelines. As to the request for the Disablement Income Group and the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People to be involved in that process, I confirm that Pauline Thompson and Jane Campbell served on the technical advisory group, and I assure hon. Members that they will continue to provide advice.

I repeat that existing schemes are not affected by the measure. If authorities decide to proceed with a scheme, that is entirely their decision. Consultation is central to the process. We released the consultation paper as soon as possible after publishing the Bill, so that people would be aware of the sorts of issues that will be debated when the regulations come before Parliament. I think that has helped to focus the debate, and no doubt it will help to focus consideration of the Bill in its later stages.

I have been asked to put the responses in the Library, and I am happy to confirm that I shall do so. I hope that that will prove helpful. The measure extends choice, dignity and independence to disabled people.

Mr. Tom Clarke: We are very grateful to the Minister for making that commitment. Can he tell us when those responses will be available?

Mr. Bowis: I have not yet seen them myself. I shall need a short time in which to receive the responses and have them analysed, and then we shall place them in the Library.

Today we have had the beatification of Chelsea and, the absolution of Mid-Kent, and I now look forward to the Committee stage of the Bill and whatever it may bring.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

GOVERNMENT TRADING FUNDS

That the draft Hydrographic Office Trading Fund Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.

That the draft Meteorological Office Trading Fund Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 21st February, be approved.—*[Mr. Bates].*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We now turn to motion No. 5 on the school premises regulations. Not moved.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 7 March 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered again on Thursday 14 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Income Tax

1. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in respect of the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining a common income tax banding in each of the countries which comprise the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [17616]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): It would be nonsense for the United Kingdom to have anything other than a single income tax system because different rates of income tax would lead to distortions, complications and additional costs.

Mr. Gallie: Does the Minister agree that the imposition of an additional 3 per cent. on income tax would cause great anger and confusion for individuals on whom it was imposed in any area of the United Kingdom? Does he also agree that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) recognises this and would dearly like to withdraw from Labour's tartan tax?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point—no doubt we shall have a new industry of tax exiles in Carlisle if that comes about. Labour says that it supports the proposals of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, but then tries to move away from that. Labour says that it wants a competitive Scotland; yet it proposes to increase taxes in Scotland that would add £6.10 a week to the average family tax bill. Labour also says that it wants a more competitive and better-off Britain. It is a case of it saying one thing and doing another.

Mr. McAvoy: The Minister mentioned additional taxes, but he omitted to say that the Government have imposed an extra 20 tax increases on Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Does he accept that the hardship and confusion referred to by the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) will be even worse when there are swingeing increases in council tax for residents in Scotland, which is now to be known as a Forsyth tax?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman should look to his own before he criticises us. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor made difficult decisions to bring the British economy back under control, and the economy is now doing very well and living standards are rising. When the Labour party was last in power, it disguised its taxation by over-borrowing. Had the Labour party had the same borrowing regime as us, it would have had 10p more on the standard rate of tax.

Economic Growth and Unemployment

2. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current rates of economic growth and of unemployment in Britain; and what are the comparable figures for other European Union countries. [17617]

3. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current level of unemployment; and what assessment he has made of the level relative to those of other European Union countries. [17618]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Britain has enjoyed the strongest recovery of any major European economy, and in the fourth quarter of last year it grew faster than those of Germany, France and Italy. Our unemployment rate is well below the European Union average and, unlike most other member states, it is falling. This demonstrates the advantages of a flexible labour market with low overheads, which the Labour party would destroy by signing up to the social chapter and introducing a minimum wage.

Mr. Arnold: Did not slavish adherence to the social chapter by the socialist Government in Spain lead to one third of young people being without jobs, and to destruction and defeat in the recent Spanish general election? What would my right hon. and learned Friend

say to those first world war-style generals who would take Britain down the same path—the so-called new Labour party?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is quite right. The Government have been fighting this battle for 10 years and the results are now beginning to show—compared with those who have the social chapter—particularly in relation to youth unemployment. If we ever had a Labour Government, they would be striving to add overheads to the cost of employing people and would thus destroy jobs. The rest of western Europe wants to emulate us and to start to remove those overheads.

Mr. Devlin: While the unemployment figures in Britain are decreasing, which is a great pleasure to us all, one of the concerns in my constituency is the continuing difficulty of young people finding jobs. Is not youth unemployment in other major European countries considerably higher than it is in Britain? Will the Minister give hon. Members some figures, so that they can compare the success of the British economy with other economies?

Mr. Clarke: Our rate of youth unemployment is below the European average. Youth unemployment is 38.2 per cent. in Spain, 26.5 per cent. in Italy and 27.7 per cent. in France. We well remember that the French Government tried to reduce the minimum wage for young people because they knew that it was causing the unemployment. It is a matter of grave concern that young people in my hon. Friend's constituency are still having difficulty getting jobs, but the Labour party would destroy the jobs that some of those young people already have.

Dr. Bray: The Chancellor is putting the best face that he can on the economy in time for the general election, without much help from Conservative Back Benchers. Is he aware that the figures that he is quoting are short-term and cyclical? Is he satisfied that underlying investment in the economy is sufficient to maintain competitiveness?

Mr. Clarke: The circumstances for investment are very good indeed, as evidenced by the present state of company balance sheets, enhanced profitability and the prospects of rapidly growing consumer demand. The hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber on Monday; he knows that Conservative Back Benchers share that confidence, as does the business community in this country. The economy is growing and poised to grow faster. This is not just pre-election—the general election is some way away, but the economy will carry on improving all the way from now to the election, as it has done well in the recovery of the past two or three years.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer accept that in tackling growth the key integers of interest rates and inflation are crucial? When the Chancellor meets the Governor of the Bank of England later this afternoon, how will he balance the needs of the two parts of the economy—the industrial sector, which desperately needs an interest rate cut to stimulate investment, and the consumer sector, which the Chancellor says is facing a strong boom? How can he ensure that he gets the balance right without triggering an upsurge in inflation?

Mr. Clarke: Throughout this recovery, we have had a tale of two economies in this country, with, until recently, manufacturing and exports booming and construction and the retail sector lagging behind. At the moment, as this morning's figures from the Confederation of British Industry survey of the distributive trades show, prospects for the retail sector are extremely good. Manufacturing slowed down at the end of last year, but people remain confident.

The Governor and I will do our usual weighing of the evidence. The hon. Gentleman must read past minutes to see how we do it. We shall continue to concentrate on our task, and we shall not waste much time congratulating ourselves on our remarkable achievement so far—with the best record of sustained low inflation that the country has had for more than half a century.

Mr. Quentin Davies: The whole House is familiar with the fact that the German economy has enjoyed enormous advantages for a long time as a result of Germany's remarkable monetary stability, but it also knows that Germany has imposed great handicaps on itself by its social and labour policies. In that context, I wonder whether my right hon. and learned Friend noticed the comments of Hans-Olaf Henkel, head of the Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie, to *The Daily Telegraph* recently. He said:

"We"—

the Germans—

"have too rigid labour laws. We have too high social costs and taxes. We work the shortest working week in Europe. The German Government spends 50 per cent. of GDP, as opposed to 42 per cent. in Britain. No wonder we have a problem."

Madam Speaker: Order. Quoting at Question Time is not allowed. The hon. Gentleman should have paraphrased. I am sure that the Chancellor has got the message.

Mr. Davies: I was trying to ensure that I got it right. Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that it would be a good idea for us to introduce similar problems into this country?

Mr. Clarke: I will take the quotation as my hon. Friend's own words as he and I have argued that case often enough and the present position demonstrates that we are right. German unemployment is more than 4 million; ours is coming down towards 2 million. We are creating new jobs in this country; Germany had a negative quarter of growth at the end of the last year and unemployment is increasing yet again.

In Germany, people know that; people know that in the German industrial community. Throughout western Europe, people know that they must have a flexible labour market of the type that we have here. The old-fashioned party opposite is the only party that does not know and solemnly promises to bring to this country precisely the conditions that people are suffering from in Germany.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Why, then, does Britain have the worst record of job generation of any major industrial country since 1979? Moreover, when job insecurity is rife, when 8.5 million people have suffered a spell of unemployment since the general election and when we

have 600,000 young people out of work, is not the Chancellor guilty of irresponsible complacency now to abandon the community action programme?

Why is the community action programme being abandoned? What has the right hon. and learned Gentleman to say to the 40,000 people who, just a year ago, he was boasting would have places on it?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman's eloquent question slipped in "since 1979" in order to obtain a comparison; in doing so, it takes advantage of the recession, which the Labour Government caused and which they left to us as their legacy. As we argued on Monday, the figures from 1981 show that our record on growth and employment creation matches the best—it has certainly done so in the past few years. Unemployment has fallen for 29 months in succession.

The Labour party's so-called jobs strategy seems to concentrate on one scheme, which has been wound up by the Department for Education and Employment. Unemployment has fallen while we have readjusted the schemes. That particular scheme was quite small—I believe that it had 30,000 places—whereas the one-to-one scheme, which is prominent in the plans of the Department for Education and Employment, involves 100,000 opportunities for getting people back to work in a growing economy.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the excellent British performance on unemployment and growth is not due entirely to the magnificent economic management of the Treasury, but also to the fact that many of our friends in the European Union are still members of the exchange rate mechanism and are operating their economies to enable them to join a single currency rather than looking to the needs of their own economies? That is particularly true of France.

Mr. Clarke: In so far as those countries are pursuing the convergence criteria, if they can achieve low inflation and healthy public finances of the sort that we are achieving, that will enhance their performance and create jobs. Their exchange rates are set by the markets, like anyone else's.

Construction Industry (National Insurance)

4. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussion he has had with the Inland Revenue regarding employer national insurance contributions in the construction industry. [17619]

Mr. Jack: Discussions have taken place between the Inland Revenue Contributions Agency and representatives of the construction industry on matters affecting tax and national insurance contributions—and particularly the status of subcontractors in the industry.

Mr. Sheerman: Is it not sometimes a good thing to have old-fashioned virtues, such as paying employer national insurance contributions, because of their benefit to the economy—some estimate the figure at £2 billion a year—and also what they mean for the welfare of our people in future years in terms of who shares the burden? Old-fashioned values are not out of place in the modern Labour party.

Mr. Jack: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, as I know that he takes a particular interest in the needs of those in both the contracting and subcontracting industries. I am aware of what underlies his question; there is sometimes a problem in the contracting industry about identifying who are the genuine subcontractors. The Inland Revenue is working hard on that problem. A new guide has recently been published by the Revenue and the Contributions Agency to assist employers in that task.

Proposals in the Finance Bill will precurse the introduction in 1998 of an identifier card that will be of particular value to contractors in helping them to identify genuine subcontractors. They will also ensure that the wishes of the hon. Gentleman and myself are fulfilled, and the proper taxation and national insurance deductions are made.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the greatest causes of job insecurity is the total level of unemployment that exists in so many nations across Europe? Does he agree that the structural reforms of the supply side carried out in the 1980s by my right hon. and hon. Friends have created a lower level of unemployment in the United Kingdom, which is acceptable, without causing inflation? Is that not due solely to Conservative policies?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend makes a telling and fine point about the benefits of our supply side reforms. That is why, unlike so many other European nations, unemployment in this country continues to fall.

Job Insecurity

5. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects on the economy of increases in levels of job insecurity. [17621]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government are promoting job security by delivering falling unemployment and the fundamentals for sustained growth.

Mr. Cunningham: Will the Chancellor stop being complacent and tell us what he plans to do for the 137,000 people suffering from negative equity and the 800,000 who are unemployed in the west midlands, a fair proportion of which is in my constituency? Will he stop waffling and tell us what he intends to do?

Mr. Clarke: With respect, I am not complacent, but confident and optimistic. We are moving in a desirable direction for work security. The Opposition are making completely fanciful use of the figures showing the number of people who changed jobs in recent years. Every year, millions of people move from one job to another. Unfortunately, there are always some people who become unemployed, but half are back in work within six months and the great bulk of them get jobs within 12 months. The stronger the economy becomes, the better that gets. The enterprise economy that we have created is delivering jobs. Labour's proposals would destroy jobs and set us back.

Sir Jim Spicer: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that to find an example of real job insecurity, we need look no further than Germany, where, because of the cost of social taxation and other on-going costs that are piled on employers, particularly in the farming community, there is a tendency for farmers to lay off all their workers in September or October and not bring them back until March? That surely is real job insecurity.

Mr. Clarke: Precisely, but it is just brushed aside by the Opposition. Employers pay social charges of £32 in Germany and £41 in France for every £100 that they pay in wages. The equivalent figure here is only £18, which is why the purchasing power of wages is roughly comparable and we create more jobs. That underlying point cannot be emphasised too often, because it is challenged directly by the Opposition, who would add burdens to employment and set us back again.

Mr. Skinner: Is it not about time we heard some truth about these unemployment figures? The figure is not 2¼ million, as is often parroted by Tory Ministers. More than 700,000 women do not register that they are out of work, 600,000 young men and women are on the slave labour schemes organised by the Government and do not get the dole, and another 500,000 people are claiming other social security benefits. The real truth is that more than 4 million people in Britain are out of work, at a cost of £30 billion to the taxpayer. There is a moral, economic and social argument for getting the jobless figures down. Those are the real figures. People in the real world laugh at the Chancellor when he talks about a feel-good factor, when all they feel is insecurity.

Mr. Clarke: The Labour party used to peddle that nonsense in the mid-1980s. They continued saying that the employment figures were not really falling when there were labour shortages all over the country all the way into the boom. They need only consult the Central Statistical Office, which is independent of ministerial control, or look at the labour force survey, which is conducted under International Labour Organisation rules, to find the same message, or use the Eurostat figures which are prepared outside Britain as an international comparison. The hon. Gentleman is doing what his hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench do—he is burying his head in the sand and advocating policies that would drive unemployment up to the levels of countries which are trying to get rid of the policies that he still advocates.

Mr. Evennett: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that a flexible labour market is essential to job creation, and that lower taxes on business and less bureaucracy are the key to the long-term future prosperity of Britain and job security for our people?

Mr. Clarke: I agree entirely. The Government's efforts are all bent to achieve that combination of circumstances, which is largely responsible for the rapid growth of small business and the creation of job opportunities. My hon. Friend and I both know that we have to persist in that. The Germans and the French will make themselves more competitive, get their costs down and come back at us. We are in the lead at the moment; if we create a deregulated economy, lift the red tape from business and minimise the costs of employment, our prospects will be better than they have been for a generation.

Ms Primarolo: Is the Chancellor aware that 2.9 million women have suffered periods of unemployment since 1992? Job insecurity, zero-hour contracts, and temporary and part-time work characterise their employment. Does the Chancellor have a message for women in International Women's Week to demonstrate his commitment to eradicating their job insecurity or will he continue to be frozen in the ice of his own complacency and indifference to women's employment contracts?

Mr. Clarke: We seem to be having a dialogue of the deaf. I will try to deflate the image of suffering womanhood that is being depicted. The Government are in favour of providing employment opportunities for more women. A higher proportion of the total work force is in employment in this country than in any other European country, bar Denmark. The share of temporary employment in Britain is the lowest of any major European country. Despite an increase since 1993, temporary jobs represent only a relatively small proportion of total United Kingdom employment. The social democratic model in western Europe on which the hon. Lady styles herself has fewer women in work, more women who are not economically active and more temporary jobs than the United Kingdom.

European Community Budget

6. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government are taking to counter fraud and mismanagement in the EC budget. [17622]

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The Government are at the forefront of the fight against fraud, waste and poor financial management within the European Community. For example, the Madrid European Council in December 1995 adopted the proposal of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to examine measures to extend the system of financial penalties, which already applies to agricultural spending, to other sectors such as the structural funds.

Mr. Hayes: I apologise to my hon. Friend and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for not calling them complacent—which is obviously the soundbite of the day—because clearly they are not. Will my hon. Friend tell the people of this country—the majority of whom are not Europhiles or Eurosceptics but Euro-couldn't-care-lesses—that without the Maastricht treaty the European Court of Auditors would not have been strengthened to combat fraud?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is right. The European Court of Auditors report used to be forgotten shortly after it was produced. At Maastricht we insisted that it be made a full institution of the Community, and its reports are now noted and acted upon. That is a big advance in our attempts to control the European budget.

Mr. Sheldon: Is the Minister aware that the European Court of Auditors now has to produce an annual statement of assurance which provides an opportunity to question it

rigorously, as the Public Accounts Committee is doing in meeting the individuals concerned? Will he assure the House that the Government will take that process very seriously? It is a new opportunity to press the Court of Auditors about the assurance it provides.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. The statement of assurance is a new weapon. The British Government proposed at Maastricht that the European Court of Auditors should produce a new, comprehensive audit. We have debated that already in Committee, and I assure the House that it will be treated extremely seriously and acted upon.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of countering fraud is by reducing opportunities for it to occur? Cannot the Government assist in that endeavour by fighting for massive reductions in the European Community budget, thereby giving more money back to taxpayers to spend in the way that they, rather the bureaucrats in Brussels, think fit?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We do insist on checks, not just on the quantity of money spent but on the quality of that expenditure. We receive no help whatsoever from the Labour party or from its allies in the socialist group in Europe, which always presses for a higher budget and more expenditure, and takes too little interest in ensuring quality of spending and standing up for the taxpayers in each member state.

Mr. Darling: Given the importance of the European Court of Auditors, does the Minister share the dismay felt by many people about the findings of the Coopers and Lybrand report regarding the court's inability to control its own spending and to keep tight control over the behaviour of its officials? If the Government want to be at the heart of Europe, what have they done to date to ensure that the Court of Auditors is controlled properly and effectively?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We entirely agree that the Court of Auditors must obey the diktats of financial discipline, whereas the Opposition always want more money spent on all the organs and institutions of the European Community, as well as on the Court of Auditors. Just because money is available, it should not necessarily be spent until we can get value for money. That applies to the Court of Auditors as much as to anything else.

Small Businesses

7. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal measures he plans to assist small businesses further. [17623]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): Thriving, growing small businesses are vital for the health of the economy. The last Budget introduced a number of measures to assist small businesses.

Mr. Steen: In the spirit of deregulation, will the Chancellor consider establishing a penalty system for every Government Department that produces unnecessary rules and regulations—perhaps fining them £1,000 per page? Is my hon. Friend aware that 96 pages of rules and regulations are being introduced under the Activity Centres (Young People's Safety) Act 1995, when the Government said that they would have a light touch and introduce the minimum number of rules and regulations? The Government have an opportunity to recoup money from Departments which overspend on rules and regulations and to join the Prime Minister's crusade for fewer rules and regulations. The Chancellor could do that immediately and cut expenditure from the public purse tomorrow.

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend's concern about over-regulation is well known, and I congratulate him on always promoting the cause of deregulation. Over the past nine months, I have used the deregulation route to reduce regulations on building societies, industrial insurance, friendly societies and credit unions, and now to truncate checks. The Central Statistical Office has been asked to reduce its burden on business by 25 per cent. That is not perfect, but I hope that my hon. Friend considers that we have taken a few steps in the right direction.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the Minister consider what fiscal measures could be introduced to help businesses and their employees with the costs of child care?

Mrs. Knight: The hon. Lady makes the real point that all working mothers are looking for child care. Most working mothers prefer a grandma or aunt to look after their children whenever possible, as the child's stability should be paramount. The various nursery education measures that the Government have brought in and are introducing will help. We have assisted with child care in many areas.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that as the majority of small businesses are run by self-employed people, lowering income tax is the best fiscal measure that the Government could possibly introduce? When it comes to deciding which party is the party of small business, the answer must surely be the party that lowers income tax—not the party that cannot make up its mind.

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The Budget will reduce taxation, which will benefit small businesses. We also ensure that the burden on small businesses does not increase, as it would under Labour—especially through its proposals for a tax on jobs.

Family Tax Levels

8. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax the typical family paid (a) at the latest available date and (b) in 1992. [17625]

Mr. Jack: A family on male average earnings of about £330 a week in 1991-92 is estimated to have paid tax of about £110 a week. By 1996-97 average earnings are likely to have risen to around £400 a week, with tax rising to around £135 a week. But that family should still be about £700 a year better off than in 1991-92, after tax and inflation.

Mr. Chisholm: Why will the typical family next year pay 34.3 per cent. of its income in tax, when it would have paid only 32.2 per cent. in 1979, according to a parliamentary answer last week? Contrary to the reply of the Financial Secretary to the first question on the Order Paper, that difference has nothing to do with borrowing in the 1970s—which never reached the levels that we have seen in the last eight years—and everything to do with the Conservative party being the party of economic failure and unfair taxation, and of saying one thing on tax before an election and another thing after it.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Member cannot wriggle off the hook. The average borrowings under the last Labour Government were 7 per cent., but are 2.5 per cent. under this Government. That equates to the equivalent of 10p more on the standard basic rate of tax, had the Labour Government had honest taxation and honest borrowing.

It is no use the hon. Gentleman giving us lessons about the tax burden. His local authority in Edinburgh spent £200,000 on a temple of tyres display and £7,000—wait for this one—on an art exhibition displaying elephant dung, phallic symbols and men having sex in a pantomime horse—and that was the watered-down version.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Regarding taxation, what matters to the average family in my constituency is the rising standard of living that they have had under the Conservative Government. Can my hon. Friend the Minister recall what the average family in my constituency recalls—the stagnation in the standard of living that occurred under the Labour Government in the 1970s? Can my hon. Friend confirm that we do not want that again?

Mr. Jack: I can certainly confirm that. It is interesting that Opposition Members always want to run away from the fact that, under Labour, real take-home pay grew by a miserly 1 per cent. That is something that everybody should remember. Under the Government, a family on average earnings is expected to be more than £4,500 better off than in 1978-79, an increase of some 40 per cent.

Taxation Levels

9. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on current levels of taxation. [17626]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Current levels of taxation have been set to ensure sound public finances and to fund the public services that people care about, such as schools, the national health service and the police. The Government are committed to reducing the basic rate of income tax to 20p, when it is prudent to do so.

Mr. Hall: Despite what the Chancellor says, taxes are higher today than they were under the Labour Government. As a result of the tax increases in the 1992 Budget, and those since, an average family will pay £800 a year more under the Conservative Government. Will the Chancellor confirm that that is why there is a feel-bad factor in the economy and why the Tories cannot be trusted on taxes?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has just explained that that snapshot of 1979 conceals the fact that the Labour Government, on their way out, raised the level of borrowing to 7 per cent. of gross domestic product, which was tax deferred—as far as they were concerned—beyond the election. We now have the lowest basic rate of income tax that we have had for more than 50 years and we shall improve on that record when we get the rate down to 20p, which we shall as soon as we can afford it.

Mr. Ashby: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we can forget about income tax for the moment and concentrate on corporation tax? Corporation tax means jobs and livelihoods. We have the lowest rate of corporation tax in virtually any industrialised nation. We are attracting jobs, and the small businesses that are creating jobs are thriving because of low corporation tax. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree?

Mr. Clarke: I certainly do, and my hon. Friend is right. The United Kingdom has the lowest rate of corporation tax of any major industrialised nation. It is just 33 per cent., and it was 52 per cent. in 1979 when we took power. We also have a lower small business rate corporation tax, which I reduced again in the Budget. The successful economies in today's world will be low-taxation economies. The Opposition would make this country a high-taxation economy again if they ever came back to power.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Is the Chancellor really so out of touch that he does not understand how angry the British people are at broken promises on tax by the Tories? Each year, the typical British family will be hit by increasing tax, right up to the turn of century. Next year, the typical family will be £670 a year worse off than it was at the time of the general election in 1992.

Even if the Chancellor is so out of touch with the British people, what about his Back Benchers? Does he not remember the look of disappointment on the faces of his Back Benchers after he gave his Budget speech? It might be said that never, in parliamentary history, have so many waited so long for so very little.

Mr. Clarke: I think that the first part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks was written about some former Budget, not the latest one. In my last Budget, I reduced taxation—not just the standard rate either. I widened the 20p band and raised the threshold, taking some people out of tax altogether. I lowered tax on savings for all standard rate payers from 25p to 20p. We are reducing taxation by cutting public spending while increasing spending on schools, the NHS and the police.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Government Back Benchers. Labour Members could not even take a view on any of the tax changes—they would not vote one way or the other. A recent survey in *Tribune* on 24 November 1995 showed that two thirds of Labour Members of Parliament were in favour of higher rates of income tax, which is what they would bring back.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is the most amazing cheek on the part of Labour to criticise, when the last Labour Government had a tax rate of 89 per cent. on earned income and of 98 per cent. on unearned income, and in one year introduced a special levy that brought in 104 per cent. on top slices of income? They even produced an investment income surcharge of 15 per cent., charged on old dears with a bit put aside in building societies. Would that not make even Dr. Goebbels blush?

Mr. Clarke: I can still recognise among Labour Members a few familiar faces of those who were Ministers in that Government and who defended those levels of tax. They are quite moderate men, but they were succeeded by more left-wing people who would have done much worse had they won in 1983—a lot of them still sit on the Labour Benches.

Comparing our respective records, one wonders what on earth Labour and the trade union movement pretend to be about. They are in favour of spending and of taxing. That is what they did before and it is what they would do again.

Mr. Trimble: Let me take the Chancellor back to his boast about corporation tax. Is he aware that the United Kingdom does not have the lowest corporation tax rate in the European Community, because the Republic of Ireland has a corporation tax rate of 10 per cent.? Is he further aware that the UK agencies responsible for trying to attract outside investment consider that not just Northern Ireland but Wales and the west of Scotland are significantly disadvantaged because of that? Should not the right hon. and learned Gentleman therefore consider reducing corporation tax further?

Mr. Clarke: I was not boasting; I was quoting the figures for major industrialised countries. Overall, it is to the advantage of the United Kingdom to let each country set its own tax—we defend that right absolutely. There is no question of qualified majority voting on setting tax rates. Competition between tax regimes usually works to our advantage because we have lower rates of corporate taxation than do any of the major countries on the continent. That, in turn, brings investment here.

My right hon. Friend has to pay special attention to Northern Ireland, however, where corporate tax rates are undercut south of the border. The Labour party would offer no redress for that. It proposes to give Scotland higher taxes for its work force than the rest of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, would have to pay. So there might be some advantage in that: Scottish industry might be driven over to Ulster if a Labour Government ever implemented their crazy devolution plans.

Mr. Riddick: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, under the last Labour Government, earners started paying income tax at 50 per cent. when their earnings reached £9,000, and started paying income tax of 75 per cent. when they reached £15,000? Does not that show what Labour does in government?

Mr. Clarke: It has always been my misfortune to earn my living outside politics when we have had Labour Governments—a great injustice, that. I well remember the high taxation of those days, which rapidly cut into people's incomes. There is absolutely no evidence that Labour's basic approach to taxation has changed. The Opposition seem to be ashamed of their policies now and will not reveal them in detail, but the great bulk of Labour Members look forward to putting taxes back up again.

Bingo

10. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the tax laws covering bingo. [17627]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

Mr. Turner: As a former bingo caller, I ask the Minister whether he is aware of the serious discrimination being felt by the 3 million bingo players in this country at the 10 per cent. tax levied on their enjoyment, as against the lower rate of tax on either pools or racing. That is real discrimination. I should also like to tell him that, up and down the country, bingo callers are now calling "Blair's lair" rather than "Major's den: No. 10."

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman is being a little too gloomy about the main part of his question, and we shall certainly disappoint him on the last part. He will know from his previous occupation that most bingo clubs are owned by big chains. Their payment of bingo duty went up last year after the introduction of the national lottery, so I do not think that they can be doing too badly.

Bingo is not quite like betting on the lottery, the football pools or even on horses in a betting shop, because people do it for social and leisure reasons. Therefore, I do not think that the comparison with the lottery is exact. He will know that we are deregulating the industry to allow it to fight back against any threat from any quarter.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 March. [17646]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Stephen: Does my right hon. Friend accept that a person who has committed a serious violent or sexual crime on two or more occasions must never be allowed to do it again? Does he accept that that is the overwhelming view of all our constituents, who are sick and tired of dangerous criminals being let out, to offend again and again, by out-of-touch judges, some of whom sit in the Court of Appeal?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes his point forcefully. Our aim is to protect the public from dangerous and persistent criminals. We are concerned to ensure that, for example, repeat rapists are not released from prison if they remain a danger. At present, that can happen, and it is a matter of concern to the public. On those grounds, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is right to proceed with his proposals.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity categorically to deny the lunchtime news reports that the Government are considering taking away all employment rights from millions of people who are employed by small businesses?

The Prime Minister: We shall have some things to say on Monday about small businesses, but they will certainly not include what was the reported on the news at lunchtime.

Mr. Blair: Can we—*[Interruption.]* The proposal, as people will know, was made by the Deputy Prime Minister. Can we take it from the Prime Minister's answer, which I thought was clear, that that proposal is gone, and dead and buried?

The Prime Minister: I thought that I made the point clear to the right hon. Gentleman a moment or so ago. We shall be announcing a number of very attractive policies on Monday, but I have to tell him that that is not one of them.

Mr. Blair: I congratulate the Prime Minister. The proposal was made two days ago, and now it has been dropped. We welcome that. Since we already have the President of the Board of Trade's letter referring to the Deputy Prime Minister's letter, can the Deputy Prime Minister's letter be published so that we can see what other proposals have been made and whether they, too, are to be denied?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will see the proposals clearly because we shall announce them on Monday. They will be very attractive. I think that small businesses will welcome them. The right hon. Gentleman should remember that small firms create the vast majority of new jobs. They have done so for years past and they will do so in future. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad to hear that I carry Opposition Members with me.

There can be no employment rights if there is no employment. We are seeking to maintain a fair balance between the rights of employees and the burdens on employers. We are therefore proposing to reduce or remove unnecessary burdens. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] I am interested that Opposition Members would like to keep unnecessary burdens. No wonder that in every socialist Government throughout Europe, unemployment increases.

Opposition Members would like to retain unnecessary burdens. I would like to get rid of unnecessary burdens, and I would welcome some support for that from the Labour party. Clearly, there is no support for that from the Labour party; burdens it likes and burdens it would wish to have.

Sir Marcus Fox: Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that the opting out of a single currency is of supreme importance to the country? Would it not be damaging—

Hon. Members: Reading.

Madam Speaker: Order. Sir Marcus.

Sir Marcus Fox: Would it not be damaging if other countries ignored this criterion? May I suggest with hope to my right hon. Friend that the issue of a single currency, if introduced, would be one on which we should hold a referendum?

The Prime Minister: I have made it clear to the House on previous occasions that I believe that a referendum on joining a single currency could be a necessary step. My position has not changed. I still believe that it might be the right course. At present, the Government are considering the circumstances in which a referendum might or might not be appropriate. We shall tell the House of our conclusions as soon as we have reached them.

Mr. Ashdown: In view of the Prime Minister's rather different answer to the last question of the Leader of the Opposition, does he agree that we shall never build or strengthen the small business sector by encouraging employers to adopt a hire-and-fire mentality and treating employees as scrapheap labour?

The Prime Minister: No one is seeking to do that. The right hon. Gentleman should know better than that. We are encouraging a hire mentality. That is why unemployment has fallen while it is rising in other countries. I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will have order.

The Prime Minister: I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman what would create a fire mentality among small and large employers—the sort of burdens that would accumulate under the social chapter, which the right hon. Gentleman would like. Included would be the burdens that would be accumulated under a minimum wage policy, which, again, the right hon. Gentleman would like. The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head. If he has a policy change to make, we shall be pleased to hear it. Labour's plans for a minimum wage could destroy thousands upon thousands of jobs, as would the social chapter, and both policies are supported by the right hon. Gentleman. The Government are creating jobs, and the Opposition parties' policies would destroy them.

Mr. Barry Porter: In view of the depressing statement by the Provisional IRA yesterday, where do we go from here?

The Prime Minister: I think that the proposals that I set out the other day were perfectly clear. Sinn Fein has the opportunity, provided that there is a ceasefire and that it meets the other criteria, of joining in the democratic debate. If it fails to take that option, the debate will not stop. The debate will continue with the constitutional parties. I believe that that is the right way in which to proceed. Were we not to proceed with just the constitutional parties, we would have permitted the IRA to stop the constitutional process. I am not prepared to do that and neither, in my judgment, is any of the constitutional parties.

Q2. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 March. [17647]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Campbell: Is it fair that Camelot is now able to pay out less than £10 to a player with three correct numbers? Bookmakers have to meet their obligations, so why should not the lottery operators do the same out of their obscene profits?

The Prime Minister: The operators have to meet their obligations. The chances of someone winning the jackpot are much greater than the chances of not being paid £10 for three numbers, as Oflot itself set out this morning. The hon. Lady should know that it was Parliament that decided that the lottery should be administered by an independent regulator. The hon. Lady's party was very keen that that should be the case. The hon. Lady shakes her head. I think that I recall that the Opposition voted that it should be dealt with by an independent regulator. It is for the director general of Oflot to consider how to protect players' interests. That is what he has done. She should direct her question to him.

Mr. Lamont: In the run-up to the intergovernmental conference, would the Prime Minister like to congratulate the European Commission on the success of its "Interfere in Britain" week? Should the first prize go to the European Court of Justice for its ruling on fishing or to the attack on the brand of Cheddar cheese, or should the golden fleece go to the European Commission's astonishing dawn raid on the Football Association's headquarters? Does the Prime Minister agree that there was never a truer word spoken by the European spokesman yesterday than when he said:

"We are talking millions of footballs"?

The Prime Minister: I must say to my right hon. Friend that I did not see that remark. I am rather sorry that I did not. I shall have the opportunity of discussing those matters with the President of the Commission later on this afternoon.

Q3. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 March. [17648]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gunnell: Has the Prime Minister seen the published explanation of the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) for his reluctant vote with the Government on the Scott report, in which he says that he voted because the Prime Minister personally told him that the Ulster Unionists had held a gun to his head and that losing the vote would damage the peace process? Is that true, and, if so, does it square with the Prime Minister's pledge to keep the peace process in Northern Ireland completely separate from intensely controversial issues here at Westminster?

The Prime Minister: I made it clear from the outset that I shall deal with the peace process on its merits. I believe that that is the way that it should be dealt with—on its merits. That is the way it has been dealt with so far; that is way it will be dealt with in the future. I certainly have not seen any such newspaper reports.

Mr. Renton: Can my right hon. Friend confirm, with regard to the important speech that he made in Hong Kong on Monday, which has given new confidence there in these last 500 days of colonial rule, that Britain has no current immigration problems with Hong Kong and that the 3 million people who already have visa-free access to this country abide by the rules? They come here as students, tourists or business men and they do not wish to settle here.

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can confirm that to my right hon. Friend. In fact, in total, 1.2 billion people already have visa-free access to Britain. We have had no problems whatsoever with visa-free access from Hong Kong and I do not believe that there will be any in future. One of the principal reasons for taking this decision was to provide more assurance to people in Hong Kong, because I believe that such assurance will make it even more likely that they will remain there and continue to ensure that Hong Kong is a success in the future.

Q4. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 March. [17649]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hall: Is the Prime Minister aware that he spoke for the whole nation when he endorsed Chris Patten as the next leader of the Tory party in opposition, because he acknowledged that there was nobody in his Cabinet with leadership potential?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had read what I actually said, he would know that that was not it. In fact I said:

"There are a number of colleagues with outstanding ability",

I am delighted that that is so. What upsets the hon. Gentleman is the fact that there is nobody with outstanding ability on the Opposition Benches.

Q6. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 March. [17652]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Sir John Hannam: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the success of his far east tour. Does he accept that it is far better for this country to secure future jobs for British workers than to keep up the continuous carping criticism expressed by the Opposition parties?

The Prime Minister: What was most striking about the conference in Bangkok was the extent to which growth in the far eastern economies provides business and trading opportunities for this country. I think that many people throughout Europe have utterly failed to realise the sheer size and scale of the change that has taken place across Asia, and the opportunities that are provided as a result. During my visit, a number of business deals were struck between companies here and companies in the far east, and I very much hope that there will be more. Such deals provide jobs, security and prosperity for people in this country.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House give us details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 11 MARCH—Estimates Day (2nd allotted day—1st part). There will be a debate on the Spring Supplementary Estimate, Class XIII, Vote 4, Department of Social Security: Administration and Miscellaneous Services. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion relating to Welsh Standing Orders.

At 10 o'clock, the House will be asked to agree the spring supplementary estimates and the defence votes A.

TUESDAY 12 MARCH—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

Second Reading of the National Health Service (Residual Liabilities) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 13 MARCH—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the London Regional Transport Bill.

THURSDAY 14 MARCH—For three hours, motions on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (Continuance) Order and the Prevention of Terrorism (Exclusion Orders) Regulations.

FRIDAY 15 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 13 March to consider European Community document No. 12377/95 relating to equal opportunities for men and women.

For the next week, I can give the following details—of course, on a more provisional basis:

MONDAY 18 MARCH—Opposition Day (7th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

Motion relating to the Education (School Premises) Regulations.

TUESDAY 19 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill.

WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the Reserve Forces Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 21 MARCH—Debate on the forthcoming intergovernmental conference on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 22 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

Monday 11 March: Estimates Day.

Spring Supplementary Estimate, Class XIII, Vote 4, Department of Social Security: Administration and Miscellaneous Services. Relevant reports: the Fifth Report from the Social Security Committee of Session 1994-95 on The Work of the Department of Social Security and its Agencies (House of Commons Paper No. 382), the Government's reply thereto (Cm 3148) and the Social Security Departmental Report: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995-96 to 1997-98 (Cm 2813).

Wednesday 13 March:

European Standing Committee B—European Community document: 12377/95, Equal Opportunities for Men and Women. Relevant European Legislation Reports: HC 51-vi (1995-96) and HC 51-ix (1995-96).]

Mrs. Taylor: First, in the light of last night's events, it is entirely proper that the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1996 should be brought back for debate as soon as possible, and I am glad that the Leader of the House has facilitated that.

As we now know that the White Paper on the IGC will be published next Tuesday, will the Leader of the House tell us whether there will be a statement to the House that day, and if so, which Minister will make it? And can the right hon. Gentleman tell us when the two significant Bills that have not yet come before the House—the Broadcasting Bill and the Family Law Bill—will be debated? When will the Government make it clear whether they intend to reverse their defeats in the House of Lords on the vital issues contained in those two Bills?

In view of the real anger that was felt by Conservative as well as Opposition Members during yesterday's statement on the judgment of the European Court of Justice in relation to the so-called Spanish quota hoppers, and the importance of that judgment to the British fishing industry and the operation of the common fisheries policy, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on an issue that has aroused a great deal of parliamentary as well as public concern?

Following today's publication of the report on the Sea Empress disaster, may we have a debate on whether immediate lessons can be learned from that devastating event, or whether a fuller, independent inquiry is needed, so that there is no question of minimising the impact of one of the worst environmental catastrophes to hit Britain's coastline?

Finally, has the Leader of the House seen the press reports suggesting that the South-East Staffordshire by-election will not be held until 2 May? Given the understanding that writs are moved within three months of a vacancy occurring, will the Leader of the House refute those reports and confirm that, if the three-month limit is to be met, the writ for the by-election must be moved next week?

Mr. Newton: I note the hon. Lady's remarks about the Education (School Premises) Regulations. I do not wish to intrude on last night's operation of the usual channels, and, in any event, the hon. Lady will have noted that we have rescheduled the debate on the regulations.

The hon. Lady asked about the intergovernmental conference and the White Paper. I can confirm that I expect the White Paper to be published next Tuesday, 12 March, and that its publication will be accompanied by a statement, which I believe will be made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

I cannot yet give dates for debates on the Broadcasting and Family Law Bills. The Government are, quite properly, considering matters that have been the subject of debate and, indeed, decision in the House of Lords.

As for Factortame and the common fisheries policy, I cannot add to what was said yesterday by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and

[Mr. Newton]

Food. My right hon. and learned Friend indicated, however, that the Government would seek to raise those matters, and I mentioned the debate on the forthcoming IGC in my statement.

A special bulletin containing interim findings relating to the Sea Empress was indeed issued today, but that, of course, is not the report of the full inquiry, which I understand will be published as soon as possible. It may be more appropriate to think in terms of a debate at that later stage.

As I have said on a number of occasions, the by-election is not a matter for me, but I have no doubt that the hon. Lady's words have reached the ears at which they were directed.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): May we have a debate soon on the future of the constitution? My right hon. Friend knows of my interest in constitutional matters, but it has been sharpened lately by events such as yesterday's Labour party U-turn on the question of fundholders. We are rapidly reaching a point at which not a single Opposition policy was not once one of ours. As far as I can see, there is no constitutional precedent for that in this century.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend may well be right, but I have no plans at present to schedule a debate on the constitution. Perhaps he can find other ways of ventilating his views.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I return to the subject of deregulation of employee protection? If the Government are to make a substantial statement on Monday about changes that will affect small businesses, will the Leader of the House give an absolute assurance that that statement will be made by the President of the Board of Trade, in the House of Commons and nowhere else?

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said several times—quite clearly, I thought—during the exchanges a few moments ago.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I preface my question by declaring that I own and drive a Vauxhall motor car, I sell Vauxhall motor cars to hon. Members on both sides of the House and I represent many thousands of Vauxhall workers in and around my constituency.

Could we have a debate next week on the motor trade, so that we can highlight the massive injection of cash—some £700 million—that General Motors is proposing to put into the Luton plant and into Ellesmere Port? Does not that give the lie to the idea that we are not a prospering industry? There are tremendous investment opportunities in this country, which is a rather different picture from that painted by the whingers and whiners on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Newton: While I cannot promise a debate, I can say that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is due to answer questions next Wednesday. I certainly endorse the latter part of my hon. Friend's remarks. That investment is another example of this country's increasing and very notable capacity to attract investment from overseas.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Leader of the House go a little further in relation to the school premises regulations debate on Monday week? It is technically a prayer and, if there are Divisions beforehand, we may not get the full hour and a half. Will he consider moving a motion to allow the full hour and a half that the topic deserves?

Mr. Newton: I thought that what I had announced was a remarkably conciliatory gesture, which I had hoped would be acknowledged by the Opposition Members with whom I have had discussions. The hon. Gentleman should not push his luck.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the reasons why there is some uncertainty in the public mind about the Government's attitude to things European is that we seem to be so reluctant to have debates on the subject? In particular, is he aware that there is great concern about the way in which the European Court of Human Rights operates, and how the convention operates, and of the strength of feeling that it should not operate at all? At the very least, should we not have a fully fledged debate, in Government time, on the future of the European Court of Human Rights?

Mr. Newton: My hon. and learned Friend will be aware that recently—I think, yesterday morning—there has been some debate on that topic, to which I am sure he paid close attention. I currently have no plans for a debate in Government time, but I shall, as always, bear his request in mind.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Arising from the comment by my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), why are the Government so reluctant to allow the people in a west midlands constituency to express their views about this Government? Will he tell the responsible Member—the Government Chief Whip—that it is quite disgraceful for people in that constituency to be denied parliamentary representation, simply because the Government are terrified of the by-election, as they know which way it is likely to go?

Mr. Newton: I do not accept in any way the tenor of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Beyond that, I cannot add to what I said a few moments ago.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate so that we can review the understanding between the House and the judiciary, whereby we do not criticise it and, apparently, it does not criticise us? He may have noticed that the understanding has broken down slightly in recent days. Does he agree that it is historically nonsense and constitutionally dangerous for anyone to suggest that elected Members of Parliament should not have the right to decide on sentencing policy and on matters of law and order? If we debated that issue, perhaps we could expose judges to the fresh winds of public opinion.

Mr. Newton: While, of course, the Lord Chief Justice is entitled to his views, so, too, are the police, the public and my right hon. and hon. Friends. It is notable that police superintendents very recently said that they totally support the Home Secretary's proposals.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): May we have a debate on early-day motion 568?

[*That this House notes with grave concern that the principle of free health care on demand is being severely undermined by the lengthy periods which people have to wait for NHS treatment, compared to the speed with which private treatment can be arranged and that this places unfair pressures on many people who can ill-afford such fast-track treatment; believes that this is illustrated by the case of 11 year-old Daniel Eden of Wingerworth, whose severe headaches and sinuses kept him away from school for a considerable period, at a crucial stage in his academic development, and whose parents faced an invidious choice in either waiting many months for treatment, while their son suffered and remained away from school, or paying to have almost immediate private treatment; strongly condemns the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health whose response to representations from the honourable Member for North East Derbyshire was that Daniel's parents, rather than the health authorities, should have used avenues to chase up more rapid health treatment; and further condemns the anodyne statement from the Minister that it is for the individual to decide whether or not to seek private health care, as revealing that he is completely out of touch with the real world in which the prospect of months of delay forces many people, who have funded the NHS through their taxes, to pay twice for treatment.*]

Why is it that consultants offer private treatment to many people who are seeking treatment in national health service hospitals, and that people are often pushed into accepting it, to deal with the medical crisis in their family? Why should people be expected to pay twice for services—through national insurance contributions and then privately?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will know that access to NHS treatment is determined by clinical priority. His remarks do not allow for the fact that NHS patients requiring emergency or urgent admission are given the highest priority.

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): Will there be an opportunity in the not too distant future to debate in general the relationship between direct labour organisations and local authorities, and in particular the auditor's report on Lib-Lab Cambridgeshire county council, which, as has been pointed out, has lost nearly £2 million in that connection, which could well have been used for schools, libraries or fire services, or even been given back to the hard-pressed council tax payer?

Mr. Newton: That sounds like another very good idea, but I cannot promise such a debate in Government time; perhaps my hon. Friend might seek to catch your eye, as it were, Madam Speaker, on a Wednesday morning.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we please have an early debate on the steps that the Government should be taking following the horrendous terrorist attacks in Israel in the past two weeks, and in particular on the allegations that this country is used as a haven by terrorists from other lands? I raised that matter with the Home Secretary and was pleased that he said that he is determined that this country should not be used as a base for promoting terrorism overseas in any way, but he has refused an inquiry. There should certainly be a swift inquiry; it is not good enough to rely on the Lloyd inquiry, which is not even due to complete its work until the autumn.

Mr. Newton: The hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the positive spirit in which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary replied to him. It is certainly the case that the British Government will not hesitate to take action against individuals involved in terrorism where any evidence of their involvement emerges, and whatever their immigration status. The hon. and learned Gentleman can be assured that my right hon. and learned Friend and the entire Government take the matter very seriously.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): May we have a debate next week on the growing practice among Ministers of leaving long delays in answering straightforward and uncomplicated priority written questions? To cite just one example, I sought to ask a question a fortnight ago on whether the Government had any plans to change the arrangements for party political broadcasts. I understand that there may be an interest one way or the other, but I see no reason for not giving a straightforward answer to such a simple question.

Mr. Newton: I shall look into the point that my hon. Friend raises.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): As the Prime Minister has not had time to make a statement today on his far east trip, will the Leader of the House ensure that he does so, because the House would like to hear what the Prime Minister did on that visit and ask questions about it?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend did indeed refer to one aspect of what he said and did on that trip with, I thought, general approval from the House. I can assume only that the hon. Gentleman was not listening or has not been reading the newspapers recently.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on trade and industry, which would not only allow us to highlight the Government's excellent policies in that respect, but answer a very intriguing question—whether the Opposition have a shadow trade and industry spokesperson? It may not have escaped people's notice that during the recent debate on the Scott report, which was so excellently led by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, the Labour party had to bring on a substitute.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) will read my hon. Friend's remarks. Clearly, arrangements as to who speaks on Opposition Benches are not a matter for me.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Has the Leader of the House seen the report prepared by the Health and Safety Executive, which shows that a massive investment is needed in Railtrack to meet basic safety standards? The report follows revelations last year in the Hesketh report, that three quarters of the £170 million programme of investment in signalling has been shelved by Railtrack or delayed. Will the Leader of the House assure us that there will be a full debate in the House on Railtrack, in which hon. Members can freely air the investment liabilities

[Mr. Hugh Bayley]

before the Government publish the prospectus for the flotation of Railtrack, so that potential investors know what they are buying into?

Mr. Newton: There have already been quite a lot of opportunities, over a long period, to debate those matters. Therefore, I do not plan to make further provision for such a debate in Government time in the near future. On the investment position, one of the aims of the proposals is to improve effective investment in the industry, and there is every sign that that will happen.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on early-day motion 564 next week?

[*That this House deplores the pressure upon Ealing Council by a Labour councillor to house labour voters in a property to which they have no entitlement; further deplores that councillor's written statement that the same Labour Council should be building up Labour Party support in his ward by manipulation of the housing waiting list; supports the fury of people on Ealing Council's housing waiting list who regard this cheating as depriving them of the council home they need; and further regrets that Ealing Council have lost the file relevant to the case in advance of an official enquiry in this scandal.*]

Such a debate would enable me to bring before the House the complaints of a large number of my constituents who are on the housing list. They object to a Labour councillor putting pressure on Ealing council to put Labour voters into council properties at their expense. I refer also to an untrue statement by a Labour Member, who said that the leader of Ealing Labour council took immediate action once the matter was drawn to his attention. That incident occurred last May and was brought to public notice only two weeks ago by the Conservative members of Ealing council. No action had been taken by the Labour council in all those months, and my constituents are furious.

Mr. Newton: I understand that there is an independent inquiry into those matters, and I am sure that the people of Ealing will be extremely interested in its findings.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motion 554?

[*That this House notes the current financial difficulties of the Conservative Party; notes the extraordinary efforts being made by the Conservative Party Board of Treasurers and others to raise sufficient moneys to adequately fund the next general election campaign; notes the reluctance of both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to reveal the identity of previous current and potential donors whom the Prime Minister will be meeting in Hong Kong; questions whether issues of party funding should be raised during the course of a publicly funded visit; notes the appointment of Mr. Leonard Steinberg last year as a member of the Conservative Board of Treasurers and the fact that following publication of the Green Paper on casinos, bingo clubs and advertising of commercial gambling the price of shares in Stanley Leisure plc rose from 372 pence on Monday 26th February to 435 pence at close of trading on Thursday 29th February; notes that Leonard Steinberg's holding in Stanley Leisure rose by £7.8 million pounds in four days and asks Mr. Steinberg to make a public statement giving an assurance that no part of his windfall gain will find its way into the coffers of the Conservative Party; reaffirms the need for an enquiry into the need for transparency over party funding; and calls for an enquiry by the Stock Exchange Market Regulation Department into the 9 per cent. increase in the share price during the five week period immediately prior to the announcement of the Green Paper.*]

The motion shows how Mr. Leonard Steinberg of the Conservative Board of Treasurers managed to make £7.8 million in four short days after the publication of a Green Paper. In the light of that, should we not debate party political funding? Could the reason why the Prime Minister has not come to the House to talk about Hong Kong be that he is frightened that he will be asked questions about whether he met Conservative party contributors who might contribute towards the next general election?

Mr. Newton: I am glad to see a smile on the hon. Gentleman's face at the end of his question, to which the answer is no.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will my right hon. Friend take note of the comments made today by Opposition Members about small businesses? Will he consider a debate on those issues, particularly the Scottish aspects, including the tartan tax and the threat of lifting rate capping on non-domestic rated properties?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is right, as is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, to suggest that the policies advocated from almost every quarter on the Opposition Benches would be extremely damaging to small businesses. The Government's policies are designed to help such businesses, and I shall bear in mind the request for such a debate.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will there be time for a debate on Post Office finances next week? A parliamentary answer to me on 25 January revealed that the Duchess of York had been illicitly using freepost for more than three years. Surely the curtain of secrecy should be lifted on the way in which postal users subsidise the royal family's use of the post. Is it not wrong that pensioners and other people on low incomes pay for up to 50 rich royals to freeload in that way? Are there any proposals for the Duchess of York to pay back her illicit use of those freebie opportunities?

Mr. Newton: I have no plans for such a debate.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): While I recognise that the debate on the IGC White Paper, which my right hon. Friend announced earlier, provides an opportunity to debate a whole range of issues concerning Europe, given the growing tendency of the European Court to pass judgments that laws passed democratically by the House are illegal, will he consider finding time for a debate on the sovereignty of the House, because it is of fundamental and constitutional significance?

Mr. Newton: That question is a curious echo of the one asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) in relation to a debate on the constitution. At the moment, I shall rest on the debate that I have already announced in respect of the IGC.

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): The Leader of the House may be aware of early-day motion 559, regarding redundancies among lecturing staff at Accrington and Rossendale further education college.

[*That this House notes with extreme concern the number of lecturers being made redundant at Accrington and Rossendale FE College and the consequent disruption of students' courses and loss of educational amenity; further notes that this disgraceful state of affairs is being repeated at further education colleges in other parts of the country; believes that the root cause of this scandal is the funding mechanism put in place by the Further Education Funding Council at the behest of the Government following the incorporation of the colleges; and calls on the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to intervene immediately to ensure proper funding of existing further education courses, an end to redundancies amongst academic staff and the restoration of public confidence in the further education sector.*]

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will join me in expressing concern about those redundancies and the consequent disruption to students' courses. He must be aware that that position is being repeated in FE colleges throughout the country. Will he therefore find time for a debate in Government time on the Floor of the House, to discuss the funding mechanism for further education colleges?

Mr. Newton: There are some attractions in such a debate, because I judge that the Government's policies towards further education have been a very considerable success—that is certainly the view of the colleges with which I have a connection. Beyond that, I would say simply that it is for colleges to manage staffing levels in accordance with their needs and student numbers, and that Government funding for further education continues to increase.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): As a statutory instrument has been laid concerning the storage of frozen human embryos, the effect of which will be to increase the maximum time that those embryos can be stored from five years, will my right hon. Friend please find time for a debate on that subject, from which fundamental, and contentious issues arise? Although many hon. Members on both sides of the House would agree with the extension of the time, they would want to discuss the moral issues that arise.

Mr. Newton: I note the point that my hon. Friend makes, which might also be made by one or two—perhaps more—of my hon. Friends and perhaps other hon. Members. I shall bring it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If the Prime Minister is not going to make a statement about his trip to Hong Kong and about how much money he gathered in for the Tory party when he met business people there, will he ensure that figures showing the amounts are placed in the Library, so that everyone can see exactly how much was obtained for the Tory party for the next general election?

Will the Leader of the House take up the point that I raised on Monday 4 March with Madam Speaker, when I called for a debate on the future of the monarchy and Madam Speaker kindly suggested that it would be up to the Leader of the House to move the appropriate motion? Will he move that motion?

Mr. Newton: I think that I indicated last week, and I am happy to indicate again, that I have no plans to do so.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on early-day motion 584?

[*That this House condemns the Iranian government's continued persecution of adherents to the Baha'i faith, a persecution which has resulted in 201 deaths and 15 disappearances since 1979, the current imprisonment of five Baha'is held because of their religious beliefs, the continued confiscation of Baha'i personal and community property, the dismissal of Baha'is from employment on purely religious grounds, the denial of higher education to Baha'i youth and the general denial of civil rights to adherents of that faith; and calls on the United Kingdom Government, the European Union and the United Nations to pursue all available means to effect a change in the Iranian government's treatment of members of the Baha'i religion.*]

Does my right hon. Friend believe that it is wrong that, at this stage in our civilisation, individuals in Iran should be persecuted because of their religious faith? It is intolerable to all decent-minded people that Iran should be living in the middle ages rather than the 20th century.

Mr. Newton: Of course, I endorse my hon. Friend's general point about persecution of people for their religious views, and we do indeed deplore the continued persecution of the Baha'is in Iran. We and our European partners will continue to express our deep concern about that to the Iranian Government and in the United Nations at every suitable opportunity.

Construction Industry Training Board

3.57 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I am extremely grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to raise this matter. I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific matter that requires urgent consideration, namely,

"the relocation of the construction industry training board."

I know that this afternoon the House is discussing equal rights for women, but I received some devastating news in my constituency this morning, when the construction industry training board announced that it would be relocating its headquarters out of my constituency, with the loss of 300 jobs. The matter is specific to my constituency because it is a rural area, and in such areas unemployment is high.

You should be aware, Madam Speaker, that the CITB is not like Wimpey or ICI; it is not a private sector organisation. It is governed by Parliament, by statute, and it is answerable to the Minister. Parliament sets the levy for the CITB and therefore the board is accountable to Parliament.

It is especially distressing—the feeling among staff at the CITB is rage and betrayal—that there has been absolutely no consultation with staff. The chairman and the chief executive of the CITB did not bother to consult me or to consult staff. I feel equally let down. Moreover, the chief executive, Sir Clifford Chetwode, did not even have the decency to go up to Bircham Newton in my constituency and announce in person the havoc that he is wreaking among 300 families in my constituency.

One reason that Sir Clifford Chetwode gives is the so-called Bircham Newton factor. He says that management in my constituency is below average; there is a shortage of skills and he cannot obtain top-class middle management. That is a dreadful indictment of my constituency. If household name firms in my constituency such as Dow Chemicals, Bespak and Porvair can obtain top management, why cannot the construction industry training board? If there is a problem with the management of the CITB, it has nothing to do with staff in my constituency, but everything to do with the people in London—Sir Clifford Chetwode and Ted Wilmot—who are not showing the leadership required; the fault lies with them. That is why I feel strongly that the Minister should come to the House this afternoon, and there should be an emergency debate.

The Minister must know about the grave situation. I am aware that he cannot tell the construction industry training board what to do, but he must know, and be told, what is happening; he must answer to the House. If the relocation goes ahead, it will cause devastation to 300 families in my constituency. There is a grave sense of betrayal, and I feel strongly that, however important this afternoon's business is, this subject is even more important.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have to respond to the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham). If hon. Members make comments in the House, a response must be given.

I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said. As he knows, I have to give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that the hon. Gentleman raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I therefore cannot submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

4 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise a matter of which I have given advance notice to the Clerk of the House. On 5 March, the European Court made a judgment relating to fishing and other matters, which has serious constitutional implications for Parliament's supremacy. Will you take account of the fact that, under the judgment, there appears to be a determination to assert the system under which the treaties operate and to imply that it would be impossible for this House to amend the European Communities Act 1972? That is the Act from which the European Court of Justice obtains its jurisdiction, so that it can give decisions about legal matters arising from directives. If that judgment was to be assumed to refer to the 1972 Act as well, would you reassert Parliament's supremacy?

Madam Speaker: I understand from the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks that he is about to write to me on the subject—perhaps that is the way to proceed. I shall certainly consider the issue carefully and give my response. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is aware of it, but I should like to draw his attention to the debate on the intergovernmental conference that is to be held on Thursday 21 March, when he might seek to catch my eye. I shall, of course, look at his letter when he writes to me.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would you be prepared to advise the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on the extremely important issue that he raised? I am sure that my constituents in Maryport would wish to extend to him support for his campaign to save 300 jobs—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair. The hon. Gentleman knows full well how to pursue the matter. If he comes to my office, I shall ensure that he receives every help and support. He knows very well how to proceed.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): This is a point of order for the Chair.

Madam Speaker: I am delighted to hear it.

Mr. Powell: I listened to the reply that the Leader of the House gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) regarding a debate on the monarchy. It was your suggestion, Madam Speaker, that the matter should be raised by the Leader of the House. In view of the fact that he has said today that he has no intention of allowing the subject to be raised, would you give a ruling or advice to hon. Members on how the matter can be raised?

Madam Speaker: No. The hon. Gentleman is quite incorrect. I made no such suggestion. I was asked quite properly whether it was in order for the House to debate such a motion. I gave the correct answer: yes, of course it is, with a properly drawn substantive motion from the Government or the Opposition. That was my response and it still stands.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I have your guidance on the proper issues for consideration on motions for the Adjournment of the House? We considered the Scott report last week. In the week after next, we shall debate the intergovernmental conference on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Surely such momentous issues—especially European issues—should be considered on proper motions that can be amended, so that the House can take a decision on them.

Madam Speaker: Those matters should be resolved through the usual channels. The shadow Leader of the House is on the Front Bench and has no doubt noted what the hon. Gentleman had to say.

BILLS PRESENTED

Childcare (Local Provision)

Ms Judith Church, supported by Mr. Malcolm Chisholm, Ms Jean Corston, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Miss Kate Hoey, Mr. Ken Livingstone, Mr. Jon Trickett Ms Ann Coffey, Mr. Hugh Bayley, Dr. Kim Howells, Mr. Stuart Bell and Mr. Tony Worthington, presented a Bill to make provision for local implementation of a national childcare strategy; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 19 April and to be printed. [Bill 80.]

Childminders

Ms Margaret Hodge, supported by Ms Tessa Jowell, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Stephen Timms, Ms Glenda Jackson, Miss Kate Hoey, Mrs. Bridget Prentice, Mr. Keith Hill, Ms Ann Coffey, Ms Jean Corston and Ms Judith Church, presented a Bill to promote standards of care and education for young children provided by childminders through the establishment of minimum qualifications, access to training, minimum wages and conditions with a high-quality framework for those childminders working with children in their early years: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 July and to be printed. [Bill 81.]

Women (Equal Opportunities)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

4.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): I am particularly pleased to open this afternoon's debate to mark International Women's Day tomorrow. It provides an excellent opportunity for the House to debate those issues which affect women—and men, too—and for me to highlight the Government's achievements in promoting the status of women.

May I compliment you, Madam Speaker, on your appearance on the media today? It was a rare appearance to honour International Women's Day, in which you set the tone for our debate this afternoon. It was one of dignity and great assurance, and I hope that it will continue throughout our proceedings.

I am delighted to welcome to the Front Bench my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), who is Government co-chairman of the Women's National Commission. She will be replying to the debate.

I want to examine the progress that has been made for women in Britain and pay tribute to the millions of women who bring up our children, run our homes, protect our nation and contribute to our economy. As the co-chairman of the Women's National Commission is alongside me, it seems fitting for me to begin by acknowledging the work of that organisation.

The WNC is an important source of advice to the Government on women's issues. It comprises representatives of 80 leading national women's organisations. The considerable time put in by WNC members to the work of the commission is entirely voluntary and unpaid. I am sure that the House will join me in thanking them for the high quality of their reports on many important matters.

This year, we witness a particular milestone, because the Equal Opportunities Commissions for Great Britain and Northern Ireland celebrate their 20th anniversaries. The full achievement of equality between men and women might have meant that we could announce the abolition of either commission, but I am afraid that is not the case. Both commissions still have much valuable work to do in promoting the equality of the opportunities for women—and men.

I am pleased to announce that, this year, we are strengthening the commissions. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has today announced the reappointment of Kamlesh Bahl as chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome that announcement. The EOC has undergone significant management changes in the past three years.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Minister take this opportunity to tell us what the Government's position will be on the vote that took place in the House of Lords last week regarding pension splitting at the time of divorce? It is a good time for her to announce the Government's support for the amendment, thereby making many women who have been adversely affected by divorce settlements very happy.

Mrs. Gillan: I shall not comment specifically on matters in another place, but I shall return to that issue in the course of my speech.

We are strengthening the commission, and I am delighted to announce the reappointment of Kamlesh Bahl. Mrs. Bahl's appointment will enable her to consolidate the changes within the EOC. Hon. Members will know that in February we appointed Mrs. Elizabeth Hodder as an extra deputy chairwoman. We are also about to appoint a Welsh EOC commissioner, increasing the number of commissioners to 13—more than there have been for some years.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Has there been any consultation in Wales about that appointment? Will it be another Conservative placement that is totally unrepresentative of the Welsh population?

Mrs. Gillan: I hope that the EOC commissioners will note the hon. Gentleman's attack on their position. He knows that consultation takes place, and that those appointments are made according to the strict propriety that governs all public appointments today. I thought that he would welcome the appointment of a commissioner from Wales, but obviously I was wrong.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): As more women are in employment than ever before, women's wages are closer than ever to those of men, and there is significant child care provision, will my hon. Friend tell me what else the EOC has to do?

Mrs. Gillan: The Equal Opportunities Commission has a statutory responsibility to protect the rights of men and women in this country. Hon. Members will be familiar with a recent case in which the EOC advocated equality for men.

The EOC has received Government grants for all 20 years of its existence. I am pleased to announce that, earlier this year, I awarded a grant of more than £250,000 to the EOC to enable it to update its technology. That substantial sum demonstrates in the clearest way possible the importance that the Government attach both to the commission and to equality between the sexes. The Northern Ireland Equal Opportunities Commission has received a 4 per cent. increase in its funding for 1996-97.

In the past 16 years, the Government have achieved much in bringing women's issues to the forefront of national debate, and in pursuing policies that benefit women in all walks of life. In 1981, we introduced the British Nationality Act, which for the first time allowed women who were British citizens—whether married or not—to transmit their citizenship automatically to their children born abroad. In 1984, we introduced the severe disablement allowance, for the first time making it available to married women on the same basis as other claimants.

We introduced the Sex Discrimination Act 1986, which makes it unlawful to force women to retire earlier than men, and also removes restrictions on women's hours and times of work. In 1990, we introduced independent

taxation, and replaced the married man's allowance with the married couple's allowance. In the same year, we also introduced the provision of tax relief for workplace nurseries. We have put women's issues at the forefront of Government thinking by establishing a Cabinet sub-committee on women's issues.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): During Treasury questions, I asked the Economic Secretary, the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), what fiscal incentives would be introduced for small businesses, and I received a less than satisfactory response.

The Minister will be aware that workplace nurseries are often a benefit of larger companies, which find it viable to provide them, but not of small businesses. Does the Minister have any plans to help small businesses, on which 75 per cent. of the work force are based?

Mrs. Gillan: I had the advantage of observing my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary answer the hon. Lady, and I entirely agreed. My hon. Friend gave an extremely satisfactory reply.

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): Does the Minister support the blueprint produced by Employers for Childcare for a proper national child care strategy, which this country desperately needs, and early-day motion 582, which a number of hon. Members signed yesterday?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady should know that the Government have an excellent child care record. A further £12.5 million is going into the out-of-school child care initiative. The hon. Lady was present at a press conference I attended the other day, where we launched a new video on child care provision. I thought that the hon. Lady's presence was in support of the Government's initiative.

Ms Church *rose—*

Mrs. Gillan: I will refer to child care provision again later, when the hon. Lady will have another opportunity to comment.

Two years ago, the Government took the initiative to increase the number of women in public appointments, from 23 to 30 per cent. This morning, I had the pleasure of seeing the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) speaking on television about that issue. I understand that the Liberal target is for women in 30 per cent. of public appointments. The Government have exceeded that target, so perhaps the hon. Lady will have to rethink her policies. The Government's policy was initiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Central Government, employer associations and trade unions all realise that there is more to do. Would it not be sensible to bring the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress together, to encourage their respective memberships to do better? I cite as an example, without criticism, the National Union of Journalists, which has only one woman on its executive council.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I am always struck by the absence of the fairer sex in the Press Lobby. Perhaps the press will take notice and look to appointing more women journalists to cover the proceedings of the House. If that were done, perhaps our proceedings would be reported more fairly than hon. Members on both sides of the House consider they are.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): What happened to the Conservative party target that was promoted by the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), for women to account for 50 per cent. of Conservative candidates at the next general election?

Mrs. Gillan: We differ from Opposition Members on that issue, as the hon. Lady knows well. We have 23 new women candidates already, and they were selected on merit. They will be supplemented by the lady Members on this side of the House who will be seeking re-election. We have always made it clear that we expect women to enter the House on merit, not through positive discrimination.

In a previous debate on women's issues, I told the House that, in my view, positive discrimination was an insult to all lady Opposition Members. It is clear to me that all women Members of Parliament entered the House on merit. Positive discrimination does nothing to help the cause of women. The tribunal judged that that approach was discriminatory against men. No right hon. or hon. Member would want to achieve anything by discriminating against men.

Ms Church: Will the Minister confirm to the House today that, of the 23 Conservative candidates in the 658 constituencies that will be fought at the next election, only four have been selected in seats currently held by Conservative Members? Will she also confirm that, after the next general election, there will be fewer women Conservative Members than there are at the moment—and there are not very many now?

Mrs. Gillan: The numbers of lady Members in the House are representative of the population, and make up for their lack of numbers by their abilities. I am sure that the hon. Lady's expectations will not be fulfilled, because there will be another Conservative Government, so, by my calculations, all 23 of those women candidates will be returned here in a landslide victory.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Will my hon. Friend join me in sympathising with women Opposition Members who have labels hung round their necks saying that they got here only by fiddling the rules? It has been demonstrated how much upset they have caused to their male colleagues. Is it not better, as my hon. Friend has said, to get here on our merits, not because we have dodged the rules?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is undoubtedly here on her merits, and has provided a fine example for all of us. I agree with her that it is important that women achieve their positions by merit. Positive discrimination is not the way forward, and, despite the cries of protestation from hon. Members on the Opposition Benches, I feel sure that they agree.

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Gillan: I have given way enough, and I wish to make a little progress. I am only on page two, and I have several pages to go.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Gillan: I think I might give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Porter: We should get on to a serious point. I am a most unlikely person to take part in a debate on women's rights, and I feel somewhat overwhelmed by the serried ranks on the Opposition Benches.

I heard on the radio the other morning about an anomaly that relates to working women who have disabled husbands at home. Apparently, the women do not get a care allowance, but, if it is the other way round and a working husband has a disabled wife, he gets an allowance. As that information was on the BBC, it must be true. To put the situation right would cost about £2 million, and that is not a great deal of money. As we will spend more money on strengthening—if we can call it that—the Equal Opportunities Commission, we might have a look at that anomaly. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend's remarks are most apposite for this debate. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will take note of my hon. Friend's remarks, and perhaps will come back to him on another occasion.

I mentioned the progress that women have made, and the 30 per cent. of public appointments that are now held by women. We have made other changes that have helped women.

The introduction of the national curriculum in England and Wales has meant that girls learn the same core subjects as boys. In fact, girls have now overtaken boys in GCSE standard grade science and mathematics achievements.

The Government have also put a strategy in place to prevent premature deaths and ill health, including specific priorities and targets for women's health, covering breast and cervical cancer, smoking and alcohol.

Women play a substantial part in our labour market. The Government fully recognise the crucial and increasing role that women play in the economy. Women now make up a larger proportion of the labour force—44 per cent. in 1994, compared with 37 per cent. in 1971. Some 45 per cent. of women in employment worked part-time in 1994, an option that many women with family responsibilities prefer.

Between 1985 and 1995, the economic activity rate for women with at least one child aged under five rose from 42 per cent. to 52 per cent., and the number of self-employed women has risen by 81 per cent. since 1981.

There has also been good news on the pay gap: it has narrowed to 20 per cent., its lowest ever. Since 1979, women's earnings have increased faster than men's, and the pay gap has narrowed in six of the past seven years. I am sure that all hon. Members hope that it will narrow still further as women progress to more senior positions in a wider range of occupations.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough) *rose—*

Mrs. Gillan: I have already given way quite often, and I should like to make some progress. I shall be revisiting these themes later.

The Government have put in place a number of measures to help women in the marketplace. For instance, family credit now helps more than 600,000 families to be better off in work than out of work and claiming benefit. This help is worth over £50 a week on average, and in the overwhelming majority of cases it is paid directly to the woman—including more than 250,000 lone parents.

We have been building on the success of this measure. In April 1992, we reduced the qualifying hours for family credit to 16, extending help to more part-time workers. That has been of particular help to women.

I mentioned earlier our out-of-school child care initiative. Of course mothers cannot work and contribute to the economy unless they can find suitable care for their children. That is why we are committed to the expansion of child care services—to give parents more choice. We are playing a part where we feel we can achieve most. There has recently been a large increase in the number of pre-school places. Much of that has been achieved without the need for Government intervention. We strongly believe in the importance of diversity, so that parents have a choice of child care to suit their varying needs.

In 1994, there were 147,600 day nursery places—double the number in 1984. There were 411,300 playgroup places, a 4 per cent. increase since 1983, and 102,600 places in holiday schemes. There were also more than 357,000 places with registered child minders in 1994—more than three times the 1984 figure.

The Government will continue to encourage expansion and choice of provision for parents. From October 1994, help with child care charges has been available to families receiving family credit and certain other benefits. The purpose of the child care disregard is to help low-income families to work. Child care charges of up to £40 are offset against earnings when benefit entitlement is calculated.

From April 1996, we are extending this help by increasing the disregard to as much as £60 a week, which should be of particular help to lone parents with more than one child. In the first year, we estimate that 25,000 families benefited from the scheme.

Ms Eagle *rose—*

Mrs. Gillan: I must make some progress.

Back in 1993, the Secretary of State launched the out-of-school child care initiative. The original aim was to set up 50,000 after-school and holiday places for school-age children in Great Britain. We have exceeded that three-year target, and will have created more than 55,000 places by April 1996 in England alone. Places in Scotland number over 5,000, and that figure is expected to rise to nearly 7,000 by the end of March—significantly higher than the original target of 4,000 places. We have also created more than 3,000 places in Wales.

The initiative has been independently evaluated, and its success is proven. Nearly 90 per cent. of the parents surveyed were in employment, and more than 40 per cent. of them had enjoyed some improvement in their labour market position since they began using the scheme. Satisfaction with the child care provided was expressed by 95 per cent. of parents; and 98 per cent. of the child care places created with the grant are still going strong.

The initiative continues, with the new funding of £12.5 million available in England over three years from April 1996. That means that we will have spent nearly

£60 million on that initiative, which will enable training and enterprise councils to create 18,000 further places across England. I hope that TECs will continue to work in local partnership and use Government money to attract further funding from other key stakeholders to create even more places.

The initiative is making it possible for many more women to improve their employment prospects, and I am pleased to confirm that it is being extended to Northern Ireland. Funding of £4 million is to be made available and a target of creating 3,000 places across Northern Ireland in the next three years has been set, which I am sure all hon. Members will welcome.

The Government are committed to women achieving their full potential in society. For example, we are extending opportunities of every kind for women through the "fair play" initiative. "Fair play" is the first partnership between the Government and the Equal Opportunities Commission, and was launched in the English regions in April 1994 with a brief to tackle barriers facing women in economic and social life. The concept began in Wales, and I am pleased to say that it was formally extended to Northern Ireland on 21 February, and will be adopted in Scotland very soon.

Consortia of key local players have been established in each of the 10 regions, and are covered by integrated Government offices. Members include businesses, educational institutions, voluntary organisations and others. At national level, there is support from the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress and the Local Government Management Board.

The Government also fully support the aims of Opportunity 2000, which has gone from strength to strength since its launch in 1991. My Department was among the first employers to join the campaign. Many other employers have followed our example, and Opportunity 2000's membership is three times its original size.

The barriers to girls and women are coming down. Among the 291 organisations in Opportunity 2000, the proportion of women at director level has doubled, from 8 per cent. in 1994 to 16 per cent. in 1995. The proportion of women at senior management levels has increased from 25 to 32 per cent. over the same period. In the past few years, traditional occupational segregation has begun to break down.

I remember that, in my speech on this very topic last year, I referred to our first woman astronaut, Helen Sharman. I am delighted that, since then, the Royal Air Force has employed two women fast jet pilots, and of course, last year, Concord was flown by its first woman pilot.

In government, we are practising what we preach. The civil service tries to be an exemplary employer, and since 1984, women's representation has increased at all levels bar the lowest. Several measures are in place to improve women's representation still further—family-friendly policies, women-only training, inclusion of women on promotion boards and monitoring of appraisal reports, to name but a few.

A wide range of flexible working patterns is available. In October 1995, there were 55 civil service nurseries and about 120 holiday play schemes. In addition, there were 20 nursery ventures with other employers, and 16 schemes through which places were bought in private nurseries.

I have concentrated on domestic matters, and I should like now to turn to what is happening internationally, because last year, I criticised the Opposition, who called the debate, for not looking at the international scene.

A very important event took place last year: the United Nations conference on women in Bejing. I was honoured to lead the UK delegation jointly with my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker and my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. More than 36,000 women from all over the world, representing Governments and non-governmental organisations, worked together to consider progress made on women's issues since 1985 and to negotiate a global platform for action.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Does my hon. Friend agree that it was a positive disgrace that the conference was held in China, bearing in mind that country's policies towards women, not least the killing of girl babies or their abandonment, for example? Does my hon. Friend agree that it would have been far better if representatives of countries such as the United Kingdom had stayed away and protested at the grotesque discrimination against women that takes place in China?

Mrs. Gillan: I agree with part of my hon. Friend's intervention. No one could possibly endorse some of the reports of the treatment of female babies in China. I thought, however, that China was a fitting place for the holding of the conference. It became apparent during my time there that the conference enabled the Chinese to focus more clearly on world opinion. We want to bring about change in China, and I thought it right that we should be in that country to bring the focus clearly on to women.

It was an excellent conference. We had 18 months of preparation in the run-up to it. Those months were valuable in enabling us to create and build relationships with women's non-governmental organisations, such as the Women's National Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Their assistance, knowledge and expertise were invaluable throughout the entire conference process. The Government are keen to strengthen these links. I thank all the organisations involved.

The outcome document, "Global Platform for Action", forms the basis for future work to achieve equality for women. The Government take their international obligations seriously, and we are fully committed to the global platform. Indeed, we are already implementing many of its recommendations. When I was in Peking, I outlined an implementation strategy, which is now well under way.

My Department is responsible for co-ordinating policy on all issues of concern to women, including implementation of "Global Platform for Action". It would be impossible, of course, to implement such a huge document on our own, not merely because of its size but because of its messages for business and the community as well as government. The document covers 12 critical areas of concern, and I shall take up some of them in more detail.

"Global Platform for Action" gives prominence to education. That is an area in which over recent years we have turned a major corner. That is reflected in the success of girls and women. Many of the inequalities

[Mrs. Gillan]

between men and women stem from entrenched attitudes acquired in childhood. The national curriculum is a step forward in challenging stereotype attitudes. Girls and boys must all study mathematics, science, technology, English and physical education from the age of five to 16. Equally, they must study history, geography, music and art from the age of five to 15, as well as a foreign language from 11 to 16.

We have, for example, taken a lead in developing information technology education as part of the curriculum, to ensure that it does not become a male preserve. I can see that the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) is smiling at me. She knows my opinion on these matters. We are building on this work to increase teachers' confidence and ability in information technology. Last month, we announced a pilot project designed to give up to 700 teachers portable multi-media computers as a means of developing their abilities in IT, and, in turn, improve their teaching in the classroom.

This month, we are publishing a booklet on highly able girls and boys. Meanwhile, girls now match or even out-perform boys in all first assessment tests. In 1994, 48 per cent. of girls achieved five or more GCSE grades A to C, compared with 39 per cent. of boys. More girls than boys stay on in full-time education after 16, women are in the majority in further education and form an equal proportion of those going on to higher education.

Mrs. Lait: Given the achievements of girls in education, is it not time to focus on the dispossessed young male?

Mrs. Gillan: I often feel sorry for the opposite sex, but I am not going to pursue that train of thought in this debate, which concentrates on women and the progress that we have made. I have made it clear that I do not want discrimination against men in any progress we make. Many of the subjects that we are discussing are equally applicable to men and women.

Ms Eagle: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gillan: We want to raise achievement for everyone, boys and girls, and where performance data show a difference in the performance of boys and girls, schools need to consider how best to tackle it. I was just trying to get to the end of my sentence—I give way to the hon. Lady.

Ms Eagle: Modern apprenticeships were considered by the Employment Select Committee, which heard evidence that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment was worried about. It has emerged that only one in four places on modern apprenticeships go to women, and that they tend to be concentrated in training for caring work rather than in engineering, information technology or any of the laudable things that the Minister talked about. Does that figure worry her? Are the Government taking steps to right the balance?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady knows that modern apprenticeships became available in all training and enterprise council areas in England during September 1995. The programme has had an excellent start. We went national last autumn, more than 15,000 young people are in training, and we are on course for well over 20,000 by the end of March. It is exactly what employers want. The evaluation last autumn showed that more than 90 per cent. of employers are satisfied with modern apprenticeships, and would recommend them to other employers.

Alongside education, the platform for action stresses the importance of vocational training for women. The network of training and enterprise councils in England and Wales, and the local enterprise companies in Scotland, play a major role in promoting equality of opportunity in training and at work. Their strategic priority is to help those at a disadvantage in the labour market to overcome barriers to finding work and to develop their abilities to the full.

Equal opportunities are built into training programmes for both young people and adults. TECs also play a major role in helping returners to the labour market. On some programmes, women have a better outcome rate than men.

Last December, we announced the "innovation in training" initiative, which will promote awareness and the use of flexible training. It is an attractive route for many women, because it offers choice about the time, place and pace of training. It is a convenient and readily accessible training option for women who want to update their skills, perhaps before returning to the labour market after a break.

Equal opportunities are about tapping women's abilities and educational achievements. Take, for example, the economically vital areas of science, engineering and technology. We recognise that too many top-class women researchers are lost to science and engineering after they complete PhDs.

Last October, my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology launched a new booklet called "Making the Most", which was produced in partnership with Opportunity 2000. It provides clear evidence of the business benefits to employers of policies, such as family-friendly working practices, that allow all scientists and engineers to fulfil their potential, and gives case studies from the experience of six leading employers.

Too few of our young, able women choose to study science, engineering and technology beyond GCSE. Many of those who follow such careers make significant contributions to their local communities and to the quality of all our lives. Our young women need to be more aware of that.

The Office of Science and Technology is co-ordinating a special day on Wednesday 20 March. Women scientists, engineers and technologists will appear in most regions of the United Kingdom to demonstrate and explain their work as part of National Science and Engineering Week. I hope that hon. Members will support those women's events in their constituencies.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: We all welcome moves to highlight scientific careers for women. Does the Minister agree that the reasons why many women are not able to continue their scientific careers are short-term contracts, which are prevalent in science, and the lack of child care, which has been commented on in the report, "The Rising Tide", published by the Cabinet Office? What is she going to do about that?

Mrs. Gillan: I hope that the hon. Lady was listening earlier, when I talked about our out-of-school child care initiative. We recognise that that problem is a barrier. That is why the Government have been putting so much behind the scheme. She also knows that it is up to employers, and especially employers of women scientists, to produce schemes that will benefit women.

For example, Amersham International in my constituency has a scheme under which, if a woman wishes to take a career break, provided she returns for a period each year to update herself on her discipline, she can come back to the company after spending some time away having and raising her children.

The Investors in People standard relates to all employees. However, to make that even more explicit, we have accepted the recommendation by Investors in People UK that the guidance to the standard should note that, where the indicators relate to all employees, it should be regardless of age, gender, race and disability.

I mentioned health. The platform for action shows that, across the world, one of the major barriers to women's health is inequality and lack of services to meet their health needs. In Britain, several recent advances have been made in women's health care. The Department of Health has successfully introduced national screening programmes for cervical and breast cancer. We were the first country in the European Union to do so.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Does the Minister consider that £36.80 and one milk token contribute to the health of a baby, because that is all that pregnant women get? That is all that single women on income support get. Is one milk token the Government's contribution to the nation's health?

Mrs. Gillan: Rather than criticising, the hon. Lady should say what she would suggest. I do not hear any policies. I would welcome some policy ideas from the Opposition later in the debate.

Mrs. Gorman: A milk token represents seven pints of milk. People in those circumstances get that each week for each child, and for themselves as well if they are nursing mothers. That puts a different complexion on the matter.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank my hon. Friend for that impressive and helpful intervention.

Britain was the first country in the European Union to introduce national screening programmes for cervical and breast cancer. Our other initiatives include an awareness campaign on cardio-vascular disease in women, implementation of the recommendations of the advisory group on osteoporosis, and efforts to improve mental health treatment.

Another matter that was identified in the platform was violence against women; again, we have taken action. The Government are entirely convinced that domestic violence must be tackled vigorously and treated as a crime. The awareness campaign launched by the Government in 1994 focuses on the criminality of domestic violence, and encourages victims to seek help.

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): Many of us care a great deal about domestic violence. What is the Minister's view of the Government's withdrawal of the last Bill on domestic violence, which had been widely consulted on? Many people involved in the matter had given a lot of time to advising the Government, and felt very aggrieved.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady may find the answer in the Family Law Bill.

As I was saying, the Government are entirely convinced that domestic violence should be treated as a crime. As part of our on-going campaign, an inter-agency circular on domestic violence was published on 17 August last year, to encourage a more co-ordinated and effective inter-agency response to tackling the problem by local agencies.

In particular, the Government recognise the nuisance of stalking. The Home Office is considering all the options to see what scope there is to strengthen the criminal law to deal with stalkers.

I have set out a comprehensive and effective range of measures that we are taking to promote economic competitiveness and equality for women. We have achieved much, and without accepting damaging European Community laws such as the social chapter.

Our position on the opt-out from the draft social chapter is clear. We do not intend to give it up in the 1996 intergovernmental conference. It is clear that employers in Britain and in Europe are deeply concerned about the impact of social legislation on business and jobs. Without the social chapter, we have still been able to advance significantly the role and position of women in our society, and we shall continue to do so.

In its 1992 election manifesto, the Labour party promised to establish a Ministry for women. Now it has abandoned that promise, like so many of its other old policies. It also promised to appoint a Cabinet Minister for women. But that has already been done.

I am sure that we will hear many more promises from the Labour party. However, we will not take lectures from a party whose policy of women-only short-lists amounted to unlawful sex discrimination. It is ironic that the party that introduced the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 was found to be in breach of it 20 years later.

I welcomed the decision of the industrial tribunal in Leeds, because I believe that women should be chosen only when they are the best candidates. I do not believe that any woman wants to make progress in politics, public life or employment if that involves discriminating against a man.

Madam Speaker—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry, I mean Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Laughter.*] It is an easy mistake to make. When I spoke in the previous two debates on women's issues, I spoke from the Back Benches. Today I am delighted to have been able to introduce this Adjournment debate in Government time.

Today I have announced the reappointment of the chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, and the extra funds to help update the technology at the commission. I have also announced the implementation programme for the platform for action, and I have highlighted the progress we have made.

The way forward to equality lies through education and determination, not through discrimination. It lies in giving women more choices over their lives. The Conservative party and the Government are giving women those choices. The Government's record in promoting women is

[Mrs. Gillan]

a proud one, and under their policies, women have moved towards greater equality with men. There is still much to be done, but the House will agree that the policies that we have been following for the past 17 years represent the right way forward for all women throughout the United Kingdom.

4.53 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I begin by welcoming the Government's decision to hold this debate today. We especially welcome the fact that the debate is in Government time, albeit on a Thursday evening. As hon. Members will know, for the past two years the Labour party has arranged for a debate in Opposition time to mark International Women's Day, so we are delighted that, this year, in this as in other aspects of the role of women in Britain today, we lead and the Government follow. It is worth noting that this is the only debate about the position of women that has ever been held by this Government.

The debate is an important mark of International Women's Day tomorrow, when the achievements of women will be celebrated throughout the world. I ask the House to join my hon. Friends and me in congratulating the hundreds of women's organisations that work for, and represent, the aspirations and concerns of women throughout the country.

Many of those organisations have been pursuing for years the issues that now have public prominence. In the early 1930s, the National Federation of Women's Institutes published one of the first reports on domestic violence, and the current newsletter of the Townswomen's Guild reveals its continuing campaign for a review of the law of provocation in cases in which a wife has killed a violent husband. The Townswomen's Guild is also continuing its campaign for an expansion of child care provision, and for proper support for carers.

The nationwide survey undertaken by the Body Shop and the Women's Communication Centre will be published in the summer, but already more than 10,000 women have taken part. What do women want? I shall quote from some of the responses already received. Women want

"The right to work without people saying that you are taking a man's job"

and

"The right to care for children and still have a decent pension".

One woman said:

"I want to be appreciated by society for being a mother. I want families to be society's top priority so that jobs are organised around families and not vice versa".

Other things that women have said that they want are:

"more women only public transport after dark",

"to walk with my dog in the woods without fear",

and

"52 per cent. of women in government".

Many representatives of those organisations will join my hon. Friends and me later for a reception in the Jubilee Room to celebrate International Women's Day. In a spirit of co-operation and good will, I invite Conservative Members to join us.

In September, as the Minister said, the United Nations conference on women was held in Beijing. The "Global Platform for Action" was the result. That is a set of commitments signed up to by Governments throughout the world, including the British Government.

Mrs. Lait: I am most interested in finding out at what time the hon. Lady will depart for the party. Is it not a bit of an insult to the House if she abandons the debate on women's opportunities?

Ms Jowell: I do not think that that is a serious intervention; it will cause great offence to the many organisations throughout the country whose representatives want to come to the House of Commons today to join my hon. Friends in celebrating International Women's Day.

The Beijing declaration covers a wide range of issues, from women in poverty, access to education and health care, to violence against women, human rights, and the participation of women in public life. I have been enormously impressed by the dedication shown by women's organisations throughout the country in following up that declaration. In the spirit of the suffragettes, what women want from Beijing are deeds, not words.

Women want to see the Beijing declaration being translated into practical improvements in all women's lives. It would be an unforgivable betrayal if no positive action followed the ringing declaration by Baroness Chalker:

"Progress for women is progress for all, families, the men, our children and our communities. We must respond to the vision, generations depend upon it".

Noble words from the noble Lady. Unfortunately, they look as if they will go the same way as so many other Government promises. It is one thing to cut a fine figure abroad, but another to deliver the goods at home.

In Beijing it was agreed that

"many women encounter specific obstacles related to their family status, particularly as single parents. Governments must provide adequate safety nets and strengthen State-based support systems to enable women living in poverty to preserve their livelihoods."

At home, barely six weeks later, the Chancellor of the Exchequer froze the single-parent premium in the Budget.

In Beijing it was agreed

"to promote the harmonisation of work and family responsibilities for women and men".

At home the Government refused to implement the parental leave directive, which would have given up to three months' unpaid leave until children are eight years old.

In Beijing, it was agreed

"to promote women's economic independence . . . and eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women by addressing the structural causes of poverty through changes in economic structures."

At home, British workers and British women are now alone in Europe in having no minimum wage. Truly, China is on the other side of the world.

This annual debate gives the House an opportunity to measure progress in relation to the issues that most concern women. It would be encouraging if the Government used the opportunity to deliver a report—a kind of audit—on their achievements for women. We have an annual Budget speech on financial matters; an annual statement on the current position of women would command widespread

interest. Government action for women, however, is a well-kept secret. The spirit of open government is certainly not to be seen in that regard. The Government have a Cabinet committee on women's issues, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, but we cannot be told when the committee meets, and we certainly cannot be told what it discusses. It is difficult to imagine what can be regarded as top secret.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady is so familiar with the Cabinet sub-committee on women that she has just said that it is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. Let me inform her that it is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who apologised to me earlier for not being able to attend the debate.

The hon. Lady has mentioned the social chapter. Perhaps she should talk to the deputy Leader of the Opposition, who said, I believe, that any fool knows that the social chapter would cause a jobs fallout. That jobs fallout could well involve the women whom we are discussing today.

Ms Jowell: I shall have to check the Prime Minister's answer to me very carefully. I was pretty certain that he had said that the Cabinet sub-committee was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, but if I stand to be corrected, I shall certainly make that clear.

What women want is a Government who recognise that women's lives are changing—who recognise that, while women's lives are mostly organised around a web of private relationships and private arrangements, a Government who understand those changes can be a vital source of strength for women as they discharge family responsibilities and make their varied contributions to their communities.

The biggest change in women's lives is that seven out of 10 women now work, and nearly 50 per cent. of women with children under five work. Most women work because they need the money, and they choose to work part time because that gives them the flexibility both to work and to look after their children. The prospects for women at work vary enormously according to geography and age. The employment prospects of a young female graduate living in the south-east are infinitely better than those of a 50-year-old, unskilled woman living almost anywhere. Although women now have better access to the professions, that does not yet properly extend to promotion: the glass ceiling has still to be cracked. In virtually every profession, women are at the bottom and men at the top.

Women mainly work in the growing sectors of social care, health care, retailing and catering. Those jobs tend to be done by women working part time. About 5.1 million women work part time, but more than 1 million earn less than the national insurance threshold of £59 a week. That represents a threefold increase since 1979. In those sectors, the new jobs, and the new low-paid jobs, are concentrated. Of the 1 million people who earn less than £2.50 an hour, many are doing such jobs. Those are jobs that women take because men could not afford to do so. They are jobs that rely on a second income, because no one could live on what they pay alone. They are jobs that would not be taken by single people, who could not afford to live on such earnings. They are jobs done by women with no employment rights and no protection.

Two letters provide graphic evidence of the extent of low pay. A 16-year-old girl working as a hairdresser and paid £45 for a 40-hour week—£1.12 an hour—writes:

"I have to borrow money from my mother for my bus fare and lunch . . . My mother works part time in a supermarket and doesn't earn much herself, but she does not want me to be poor".

A 40-year-old care assistant who has worked for the same employer for eight years is paid £1.88 an hour, and works a 30-hour week. She has had no pay increase for the past five years. Her responsibilities include personal caring for the residents of the elderly people's home in which she works, cooking and other kitchen duties, general cleaning in the home and dispensing drugs. Does any hon. Member really believe that work in such conditions represents a move towards equality and opportunity for women of which we can be proud?

In that sector, there has been a rapid rise in the number of zero-hours contracts. The jobs are invisible in employment statistics. They provide no security and no guaranteed weekly pay; according to the Equal Opportunities Commission, workers in such circumstances may even find it difficult to establish that they actually are employees, and are thereby denied any employment rights. Such contracts are anathema to good employers, and a Labour Government will outlaw them.

Mrs. Gorman: I hope that the hon. Lady will tell us exactly what the Labour party intends to do about such problems as the danger of walking in the woods, and that that will include the imposition of real penalties. Will she also put some figures to those proposals, so that the taxpayer knows what it will cost to implement them?

Ms Jowell: I must ask the hon. Lady to be patient and to listen to the rest of my speech. A number of her questions will be answered.

We shall doubtless hear a good deal from Conservative Members about the regulation of the labour market. They will say that any protection for employees is a "burden on business". Let me make clear what Labour wants to see.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jowell: Perhaps I could follow up the hon. Lady's earlier point, and set out what Labour wants to see. It may pre-empt her intervention.

Mrs. Winterton: I know for a fact that it will not.

Is the hon. Lady aware that, if the social chapter were implemented, it would have a huge impact on the jobs of women in my constituency? Is she further aware that, according to the CBI, 1,300 people in my constituency would lose their jobs as a direct result? Many of those people would be women, as my constituency has a very low unemployment level among women—and men.

Ms Jowell: Conservative Members constantly come out with similar lines about the social chapter, but they are not borne out in practice.

We also know that, under Opportunity 2000, a Government initiative which we welcome, employers are expected to demonstrate their good employment conditions and practices. That is a condition of their membership of the scheme.

[Ms Jowell]

Let me make it clear what Labour wants to see. We stand by the right of women and men to decent employment conditions. We shall introduce a minimum wage, along with every other country in the European Union, because we believe that those who work for a living should be paid a living wage. In other countries, a minimum wage has been used to narrow the gender pay gap. Even Winston Churchill supported the idea as long ago as 1909, rightly arguing that

"decent conditions make for industrial efficiency and increase rather than decrease competitive power".

We shall support the standards that have already been introduced by the best employers. Marks and Spencer, for instance, has banned zero-hours contracts, as has the TSB. We are determined to see the kind of regulation that supports, and does not stifle, the standards of our most successful businesses. We shall end the Government subsidy of poverty wages by introducing a minimum wage.

We shall staunch the flow of subsidy from the taxpayer to the sweatshop owner. The Government's obsession with competition under any circumstances means that, as a result of compulsory competitive tendering, every pound saved by the employer costs the taxpayer £2 in benefit paid out and tax not taken in. Those were the findings of an Equal Opportunities Commission survey.

The North Yorkshire dinner ladies had their pay cut and they were no longer paid a retainer. Their sick pay scheme was scrapped and their pension scheme was ended. That is the reality of compulsory competitive tendering for thousands of dedicated and hard-working women. That is not efficiency, but exploitation. It is not progress; it is a hark-back to the days that we should have been proud to have left behind. The Equal Opportunities Commission in Northern Ireland, in a recent report, called on the Government to halt the use of compulsory competitive tendering because of its impact on women's pay—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I have resisted intervening, but there has been no end of chattering, particularly on the Opposition Benches when the Minister was speaking, and now on the Government Benches while the Opposition—*[Interruption.]* Order. If the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) wants to say anything, he can say it outside. If not, he will remain quiet—I hope for the rest of the sitting.

Ms Jowell: Yesterday, the Government tabled amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act 1986 and to the Equal Pay Act 1970. The first proposal is to allow compensation for unintended indirect discrimination. It is a bit late, however, because the tribunals are already ahead of the Government on that issue.

The second proposal relates to the Equal Pay Act 1970. It is intended to give tribunals that hear equal pay cases discretion as to whether to seek the evidence of independent job evaluation assessors. We believe that there are risks with that proposal, which may tilt the balance of advantage to the employers, who will still be able to commission their own independent witnesses to assess jobs and their comparators.

What will happen, for example, if the industrial tribunal members decide to dispense with an independent assessor and to do it themselves, and that is challenged by expert witnesses for the claimant or the respondent? Either the industrial tribunal will have to allow for the possibility of its judgment being overridden by someone with greater expertise, or there will be no place for the use of such experts. The EOC opposed that proposal in the Government's consultation document.

Pamela Enderby's case provides compelling evidence of the unworkability of the equal value provisions. The Government were forced to amend the Equal Pay Act 1970 following criticism from the European Commission and the Law Lords. It is worth recollecting the words of Baroness Thatcher, who was fulsome in her support of that Act. She said:

"So many people have supported the idea of equal pay for so long that one wonders at the continuing inequality between men and women. I believe that the Bill will lead to better pay for many jobs."

By his own admission, Alan Clark, the Minister who was responsible for taking through the amendments to the Equal Pay Act 1970, in the early 1980s, was drunk when he proposed the legislation to the House. In that shambles probably lies—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Lady is quoting a former hon. Member, she must provide a *Hansard* column number. Otherwise, I must ask her to withdraw her statement that an hon. Member at the Dispatch Box was drunk.

Ms Jowell: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reference I made was to the former Minister's diaries. If you would like me to withdraw the observation, I shall do so. Hon. Members will be able to read the account in his diaries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not my wish to direct the hon. Lady to do anything. I have made the position clear. The hon. Lady must make her own judgment.

Ms Jowell: I am happy to withdraw the suggestion, but to commend to hon. Members the relevant pages of the former Minister's book.

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was referred to twice in the diaries which the hon. Lady has quoted. Those references were quite inaccurate, so I do not think that we need take the matter any further.

Ms Jowell: I shall briefly set out the facts of Pamela Enderby's case, as evidence of the impossible obstacles to cases being brought under those provisions. Dr. Enderby first brought her claim in 1986. She claimed that she was employed in work of equal value with men working as principal grade pharmacists and clinical psychologists. The industrial tribunal, nearly 10 years later, is now at the point at which it will examine statistics on pay and gender for speech therapy and clinical psychology and pharmacy. Thirteen hundred other claims were filed by speech therapists, from 1986 to 1987, and those are pending the outcome of Dr. Enderby's case. As I understand it, her case has only now been referred to the independent experts.

What the Government are offering—their gift for International Women's Day—is a make-do-and-mend version of sex equality. What we need is a complete

overhaul of our sex equality legislation. We are proud that those Acts were passed by a Labour Government. The Government are as aware as we are of the shortcomings of those Acts, and that their remedies take too long, cases are too expensive and do not allow for representative action. The difference is that Labour will do something about those shortcomings if we win the next election.

We need a new sex equality Bill that simplifies existing procedures, brings UK legislation in line with European law, strengthens the concept of indirect discrimination and creates the responsibility of representative actions so that incidents do not always have to be settled on a case-by-case basis. The advantage of a future Labour Government, with a new sex equality Act, is that fewer costly and time-consuming cases would go to the European Court of Justice.

The Minister paid tribute to the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission, and so do we. The EOC was the creation of a Labour Government, and it will be 20 years old this summer. The Government's birthday present to it was a £300,000 cut in its grant, which represents more than it spends in total on legal cases, and places its entire research department under threat.

The political agenda for women has moved on; it is no longer about narrow sexual politics. The new expectations of sex equality are to be seen in the confidence of so many young women, who take for granted their right to progress and to compete with men. We should celebrate the fact that, for them, the politics of victimhood no longer has any resonance.

The changes in women's lives confront them with a new set of issues. As they increasingly combine the responsibilities of home and work, they have not left behind the responsibilities that most women still discharge. Two thirds of all housework, for example, is still done by women. As a recent survey by Parents at Work revealed, however, three out of five women reported feeling that did not see enough of their children, and most said that they felt constantly exhausted.

The corollary of women taking more responsibility outside home is that men must take more responsibility within it. The long-hours culture was created by men so that they could demonstrate their commitment to their jobs by being there. "Presenteeism" is the new term in popular use. That term essentially means that, most of the time, it is not how much one does that matters: it is being there that counts. That concept needs to be challenged and changed.

In Germany, I am told, if one's car is still in the car park at 6 o'clock, it is assumed that one is not very good at one's job.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Speaking of a job in which, quite clearly, it is more a matter of being here than what we do that matters, would the hon. Lady like to tell us where she stands on this business of women-only short-lists for entry to the House of Commons?

Ms Jowell: I ask the hon. Gentleman to wait for a few moments until I come to that passage in my speech. I shall not sit down without telling him about that.

As women's lives are changing, so families are changing. Despite the fact that, in 1992, one in two marriages ended in divorce, it is worth remembering that four out of every five children grow up living with both their parents until they are 16.

As the pattern of work has changed, so has the divide between the work-rich, two-earner family and the work-poor no-earner family. It is to the Government's shame and a testament to their complacency that one family in five now have no one in work. Again, the Government's flexibility is most families' insecurity, with, as my hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor said last week, 8 million people having experienced a period of unemployment since the previous election.

Those changes to the family have different effects over time. One of the reasons for the importance of the cross-party victory last week in the House of Lords on pension-splitting on divorce is that women who now face poverty and hardship on retirement are women who grew up when the expectations of men and women were different. Those women stayed at home and brought up the children while their husbands worked. There was no national debate about the need for child care, because, by and large, the women were at home. There was no great concern about women's pensions because then women were dependent on their husbands.

The Government's failure to anticipate and protect people from the hardship of rapid social change has caused difficulty and distress. Because Labour in 1974 recognised the uncertainties of women's lives in combining family responsibility with work, the state earnings-related pension scheme calculated that the 20 best years, rather than lifetime earnings, would give women the best protection against poverty in old age.

A Government who recognise the changes in women's lives can make a difference to women and their families but if, like this Government, they believe that everything should be left to the market, they cannot provide the necessary framework of support and enablement. When it comes to community care, the Government centralise decisions and then stand clear when things go wrong. So many elderly or disabled people have no family and no community that, when local government—the resource of last resort—pulls out, there is no one left.

Before I was elected to the House, I worked with carers in Birmingham. I vividly recall a conversation with one half of an elderly couple. He looked after her, and there was no support available other than the sporadic visits of the district nurse. I remember him saying, "I put off the moment when I draw the curtains at night because when I have drawn them and it is just me and her, I feel as if I am the last person left on earth."

Child care is the most important means by which women can get back to work. It must be affordable, flexible and reliable, and it must be more than mere minding; it should take proper account of the children's developmental needs. The lack of affordable child care keeps one single mother in three on benefit, denying them the self-sufficiency that they want for themselves and their children. So far, the Government's sole contribution has been to dabble in three or four schemes and pass that off as concerted action on child care.

When mothers become workers, they do not stop being mothers or stop being preoccupied with their children.

Mrs. Gillan: I am interested to hear the hon. Lady say that £60 million is "dabbling". Perhaps she would like to put on the table the money that her party would provide for child care initiatives.

Ms Jowell: I said that because it is the view of organisations beyond the House that the Government are simply not serious about child care. Employers for Childcare, a consortium that represents 40 of the top 100 companies, is among those who do not regard the Government as being serious about child care.

Mothers who work are still full-time mothers. Child care has been a private matter for most. Paid child care is generally available only to mothers in reasonably well-paid jobs, while the children of low-paid mothers are, by and large, looked after by relatives. Publicly provided child care accounts for only 5 per cent. of the care of children in this country, which is the lowest level in Europe. Good child care is also good business, as Employers for Childcare has argued. Child care is the building block for women at work. It is also a partner to economic efficiency. It enables not only mothers, but fathers, to work.

The Government are walking away from any responsibility for making possible the sharing of parenting responsibilities. In June, we shall be the only country in the European Union to have no provision for parental leave. The Government extol family responsibility but deny parents the opportunity to exercise it when it is most important.

Let me deal now with women and Parliament. Since Nancy Astor made her maiden speech in 1920, pledging to speak for women and children up and down the country, only 169 other women have taken their seats, compared with nearly 4,000 men. Our performance in creating a Parliament that speaks for men and women is dismal compared to that of virtually every other country.

The presence of women in our Parliament, as in every other sphere of our public life, is important, but not only as an end in itself. Parliament cannot be as good at its job as it should be precisely because more than half the nation is not properly represented here. When the perceptions of women are missing from the great debates, or even from the daily round of political administration, bad policies will ensue.

I cite by way of recent example the shackling of women in labour. It would have taken only one or two women in the Home Office who had had children to tell the Home Secretary or the Minister of State that a woman in the final stages of labour is not likely to look for a window and shin down a drainpipe.

The introduction of mixed sex wards also causes enormous distress to women, especially in psychiatric hospitals. Some 50 per cent. of women admitted to mental hospitals will at some time in their lives have suffered sexual abuse. At the very time that they feel most vulnerable, they find themselves having to share lavatories and bathroom facilities with men who are also disturbed.

After the next election, we hope to double the number of women sitting on the Labour Benches. We are aiming to achieve the equal representation of men and women within three Parliaments. We are sure that that will bring a change to the nature of politics here and improve the quality of government for the nation.

The effect of the industrial tribunal ruling that the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 now applies to parliamentary selections for all parties should be of particular interest to the Minister—if she would care to stop chatting and listen. The selection process in her party is clearly rife with discrimination, and she will not be surprised to learn of a conversation that I had recently with one of her party's frustrated candidates.

The woman to whom I spoke, who is clearly a great improvement on most Conservative Members, complained that, at her most recent attempt to be selected, she had been told that no one over 45 and certainly no women should apply. She went off with a gleam in her eye when I told her of the remedies available to her now that the 1975 Act applies to the selection of parliamentary candidates.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: The hon. Lady has completely misunderstood what democracy is about. First and foremost, the Conservative party is not run by diktat from central office. We believe that constituency associations should choose the potential Member of Parliament who suits them best—in other words, horses for courses. I must also point out that many activists in Conservative constituency parties—perhaps this is also the case in Labour associations—are women, and it is women's prejudice against women that must be defeated. Our parliamentary democracy is based on local associations choosing their own candidates.

Ms Jowell: We know that the Conservative party is absolutely desperate about its dismal performance in selecting women and in contributing to a Parliament that properly speaks for the nation. It is worth reminding the House that there are more Members of Parliament called John than there are hon. Ladies. We intend to change that. There are a number of Johns of whom I am extremely fond, and whom I admire greatly.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will the Hon. Lady give way to me, as a John?

Ms Jowell: No.

Our commitment to women—many of whom feel disenchanted with politics and with politicians—is that the issues that matter to them will infuse our public and political debate. As politicians, we must listen and act on what we hear: that is a major part of our commitment to democratic renewal.

Mr. Carlisle: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that it was a custom of the House that when hon. Members were referred to by name, as a matter of courtesy, those who were speaking—either male or female—would normally give way to them. Is that not a custom of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is an historic custom of this House.

Ms Jowell: Had I notified all the Johns, I would have had to make 90 telephone calls or to have written 90 notes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you will understand that no discourtesy was intended to the John who has just come in.

Across the whole range of women's interests, the Government are doing little more than sitting with their hands in their lap, watching the world of women go by. The Government have nothing to say, or only grudging comments to make, when it comes to the Beijing declaration, the changes in women's employment, equality legislation and the new political agenda. The Government do nothing to sponsor the ambitions and

optimism of young women, nothing to mitigate the long slog of the part-time worker and the full-time mother, and nothing to ease the burdens of the housebound carer. When we are in government, we shall show what can be done to ease all these different paths, and we shall keep faith with the women of Britain—for their sakes, for the sake of their young families and for the sake of the elderly or ill who depend on them.

5.32 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Like the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), I have previously taken part in these sorts of debates and I am beginning to wonder why we bother to have them. Such debates are demeaning and patronising, and it is time that we took them out of the parliamentary calendar. It is a waste of parliamentary time to listen to this sort of claptrap. However, I will take the opportunity to put my points of view forward. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister because I will not be present to hear her wind up the debate, but I shall read very carefully in *Hansard* what she says.

I believe that there should be no discrimination at all, and that we are currently discriminating against our male colleagues. We are saying that we do not want to suffer discrimination, so perhaps we should not organise debates only for women. The hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) mentioned some women's organisations and I regret that she did not mention Business and Professional Women, which started in this country in the early 1930s, and is now an international women's organisation. It has long worked for supporting and promoting equal opportunities for women, and I am proud to say that I have been a member for more than 30 years.

There are more than 12 million women in this country who are economically active—I am never quite sure what that means, but I think it means that they go to work. Women comprise 45 per cent. of the work force, which is an improvement. The United Kingdom has the lowest unemployment rate for women, but for Denmark. Germany has 10 per cent. unemployment for women, France has 13.9 per cent. and Spain has 29 per cent.

Women have always worked—it is not something new. Who ran the country during the 1914–18 war? Women did, because most of the men went to war. That action resulted in a Bill being passed through this male-dominated House that said that women could take part in the running of the country. Women did the same thing in the 1939–45 war. Who ran the munitions factories? Women did, because most men went to war. It can be seen that women in this country have been working for many years.

There has been a huge increase in the number of self-employed women. It is sad that when women reach the glass ceiling they decide that they might as well run their own business. They are extremely successful at doing that. Since 1981, the number of self-employed women has increased by 81 per cent.—one in four women are now self-employed. The Government are extending child care so that more mothers can go to work, and the out-of-school child care grant should have created 50,000 more nursery places in England by the end of this month. That will also help women.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister persuades her colleagues to support the amendment to split pensions at the time of divorce, which was passed by the House of Lords last week. That action is long overdue. There is no reason why women—who put a lot into their family, their home and their husband's career for, say, 10, 15, 20, 30, or 40 years—should not receive part of their husband's pension at the time of divorce. As I see it, it is part of their assets—just like the family home. I hope that the Government support that initiative.

I suggest that many modern young women are well qualified in all sorts of ways—they are full of confidence when they leave school. Young women do not need positive discrimination or all-women short-lists: they are quite happy to make their own way in life. Last year, I chaired the panel of judges for the Business and Professional Women's girls' speaking competition. The standard of the schools from all over the country was extremely high—those girls could come here and teach one or two hon. Members how to stand up and speak, and how to make their points concisely. Such competitions encourage young women to get involved in public life and to take part in debates. That competition runs every year.

I believe that not many of the young women I see when I visit schools—I speak to them and listen to what they have to say—will take too kindly to having reserved places, and they do not need reserved places. If we have reserved places in the House just because we are women, I know what some of our colleagues will say when we sit around a Committee table: "We don't need to listen to you; you're only here because we saved you a place." I do not want to be part of a House, a Committee or a workplace that takes that view.

If we had a Minister for women, the same thing would happen. All the Departments would say, "It has nothing to do with me. Take that file to the end of the corridor—it belongs to the Minister for women." Women want to be in the midst of what is going on; we do not want an office at the end of the corridor—we want to listen to what the guys are saying. If we are sitting by ourselves down the end of the corridor, we will not know what is going on and we will not have any input. This has been tried in other countries—I see that the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) is shaking her head; perhaps she has not had too many opportunities to talk to people where they have had Ministers for women—and it has not always been successful.

The young women leaving schools now are more than well qualified to take their place in a modern society.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I think I heard the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) say earlier that she could not understand why this debate is being held and that it is a waste of time. I remind her that it is a Government debate. If she thinks it is a waste of time, why is she speaking?

Mrs. Peacock: Of course I appreciate that this is a Government debate. As this debate was called, I felt that I could introduce a little bit of common sense into it. That is why I am here.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning)—will recall the saying that if one educates a woman, one educates a family. That is an extremely important fact, which applies as much in this country as in developing countries. We should bear that in mind when we discuss national curricula, and so on.

[Mrs. Peacock]

We should encourage young women in their school careers and when they leave school. We should encourage them not to start life with a chip on their shoulder, because that is the worst thing they could do. They must start in the belief that they can go out into the big, wide world and that, if they are determined to do something, they will do it. They may have to work a little harder, but so what? We are used to that. It never made any difference before; I do not believe that it will make any difference in future.

Many women run their home, look after children and go to work. There is nothing new in that; women have always done so. Many women want part-time work because it fits their family routine, enabling them to be at home when their children finish school, and it works well.

Many women who run families, run their home and go to work are experts in crisis management. There should be a certificate acknowledging that. Occasionally, people say to me, "I am just a housewife"—many years ago I may have done so—but a woman at home must be an expert in crisis management or she will not survive. We should be aware of that.

Women's average hourly pay is only 79 per cent. of men's. I appreciate that that is the highest percentage ever recorded, but it is not good enough because women should receive equal pay for equal work. My hon. Friend the Minister said that, during the past five years, the proportion of Government public appointments held by women has increased from 23 to 30 per cent. My reaction is to think, "Big deal; why has it not reached 50 per cent.?" We could make progress.

There are very many well qualified women in this country. They may not all want to join us in Parliament, and some have asked me why they should swap their secure, sensible, well-paid jobs to become Members of Parliament. We must listen to what they say, but there are plenty of well qualified women who could be available for public appointments.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The hon. Lady made telling points about women's failure to achieve some of the successes that she highlighted. She has extolled the need for improvements; will she make practical proposals for achieving the targets that she wishes to achieve?

Mrs. Peacock: We can do many things. We can encourage and support, but we should not have all-women short-lists to enable women to enter the House, because they would not help.

Many positive actions are already being taken. When I entered Parliament in 1983, there were only 23 women in the House; there are now slightly more than 60. It is still not nearly enough, but we have heard that the number will increase after the next general election, and we do need to increase it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) said, when selecting for Parliament, in the Conservative party and in other parties, women are often their own worst enemies on selection committees. There have been changes in the Labour party recently and all-women short-lists started to change things, but women must support women in that respect, in which we may not always have been very good.

Mrs. Lait: I wonder whether my hon. Friend has thought that the problem is not only the women but the age of men and women on selection committees. If those people are, shall we say, older, they are not used to working with women in positions of authority.

Mrs. Peacock: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. If we all attracted younger people—as we are doing—into associations, where they would have the responsibility of joining selection committees, that would make a tremendous difference.

There is an old idea that constituencies would not select women, because women in the community would not vote for a woman candidate. That is rubbish. In the years in which I have been a Member of Parliament, each time a woman candidate, of whatever party, has stood in a by-election, she has been elected. That proves that women can attract votes; the old adage is nonsense.

With all due respect, many women in the House of Commons often work much harder than the men.

Mrs. Maddock: The hon. Lady is right to say that women have been very successful in by-elections. The view still exists out there that men will not vote for a woman. On the doorstep in Christchurch, some men said, "I could never vote for a woman," but I am pleased to say that many others did, and I am here.

Mrs. Peacock: It is interesting that the hon. Lady makes those comments, because I am always told that, the further north one goes in the country, the harder men become and the less likely it is that they will vote for a woman. That has been disproved, however, at least in our part of West Yorkshire and, I believe, further north.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Although I represent a constituency not quite as far north as that of my hon. Friend, she may be interested to know that in the next general election the men will have to vote for a woman, because all three candidates selected to date are women.

Mrs. Peacock: That perhaps proves the point, does it not?

I hope that my hon. Friends the Ministers will bear in mind that we should not put pressure on women with small children to go to work. It is worrying that people devalue women who stay at home to look after their children. It is one of the most important jobs that women do, and they should be encouraged. Money spent on helping them stay at home with their children until the children go to school at age five would be well spent, and better spent than in some categories of spending.

Many young women want to stay at home with their children but feel great pressure to return to work. They believe that people will not value them and will believe that they are not making a contribution. That is extremely dangerous.

Sir Anthony Grant: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend in full flow. Is she aware of an organisation called WATCH—the acronym for "What About the Children"—in which one of my constituents plays a leading part? Much academic research has been done in Cambridge and abroad showing how vital it is for women to be with a child in its early stages. I commend that

research to my hon. Friend—I will do so to the House if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—because it bears out what she says.

Mrs. Peacock: Yes, I have heard of that organisation, although I have not studied the research. I believe that it is important for women to stay at home with young children. Obviously, not all women have the opportunity to stay at home and there will always be women who need to work, but we should not be patronising and put pressure on those who want to look after their children. Many of those women want to return to work part time. There are part-time jobs in many spheres, but it is not always possible for a highly trained person to return to work part time.

Last week, representatives of the Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority were in the House, talking about the high-risk behaviour of young people. We discussed the possibility of attracting back to work very highly qualified nurses—including intensive care nurses—who are desperately needed. Many cannot return to work after having children, because of the hours of their duties.

A woman told me that the health authority was considering introducing a scheme whereby such people might be brought in on call—some of their work might be planned—but the authority would undertake not to call them in during school holidays. That would mean that they could return to work and do that dedicated, necessary work, yet they would not have the problem of finding child care for a long school holiday, which many of them do not want to do. They want to be at home when their children are there, and we could help; we could encourage mothers to go back to work in all sorts of different sectors. We all recognise that it is much easier for women to have an uninterrupted career if they do not have children.

A few short years ago, there was a high commissioner in London from one of the African countries; she was a large, beautiful, black lady. She had four children and we often discussed equal opportunities. I asked her whether there were equal opportunities for women in her country. She said, "Yes, of course there are—here I am. But you and I must realise that there will never be truly equal opportunities until the men start having the babies." She is right; any woman who has had a child has a certain bond with him or her. However good a father is, I do not believe that he will ever have the same natural bond with that child.

Mr. Rowe: My hon. Friend will have seen today the disturbing—I use that word neutrally—news that it is now possible genetically to engineer babies, both animal and human, without, as far as I understand it, the intervention of either male or female. Does that not put today's debate in an interesting, if challenging, context?

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): New labour.

Mrs. Peacock: I hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) has to say. I was not suggesting that we should start cloning or that women who want children should dispense with men altogether. I am not in favour of that.

We have heard much about the Beijing conference, which was well attended. It was disgraceful that the conference was held in Beijing. I take issue with the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham—because of its human rights record and everything else happening there, Beijing was not a good place in which to hold the conference. Non-governmental organisations were housed—if one can call it that—many kilometres from the conference centre. What is the point of having a conference for women if half of them are housed so many kilometres away that they cannot attend it?

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton about China's terrible record on female babies. I wonder whether my hon. Friends have had an opportunity to discuss the matter with Kate Blewett—a sensible, level-headed individual, who went to China and made the film "The Dying Rooms". If they have not, I suggest that they do so and listen to her. I saw the film, as did many others;

it was almost unbearable to watch. Kate Blewett was in China and, for me, her film was a great lesson in humanity. It was said afterwards that the film makers created the situations, but I do not believe that. I believe that they filmed the situations that they found. It must give us cause for concern that any country should still abandon its female babies. We need not rely merely on Kate Blewett's film; there are gaps in the statistics, and the number of females in China is changing, which seems to be due to the action being taken.

I started by saying that I did not know why we had this debate. However, if it is held, I need to put my views. I hope that we can be much more constructive and not hark back to what should have been done many years ago. Great progress has been made in recent years; that becomes evident when one considers the young women emerging from school. They are much more confident and better qualified and equipped to take their place in the future. I am sure that, within the next decade, the number of women on both sides of the House will have increased, which will be most welcome.

5.53 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): As other hon. Members have said, last September the United Kingdom signed up to the platform for action at the fourth world conference on women. The signatories to that conference reaffirmed their commitment to

> "Promote women's economic independence, including employment, and eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women by addressing the structural causes of poverty through changes in economic structures".

But far too many women in this country, and throughout the world, are on low and unequal pay.

In this country, 2.3 million people earn less than £3.50 an hour and three quarters of them are women. Some 800,000 women earn less than £2.50 an hour and women are twice as likely as men to be low paid. Despite the fact that, on average, women are now said to receive 79 per cent. of men's pay, many women's pay is as low as 63 per cent. of men's. A woman hairdresser generally earns about £130 a week; her male counterpart is paid £159. A woman sales assistant takes home £155 a week; a man doing the same job receives £195. In 1994, 559,000 women were doing two jobs and running their homes in order to make ends meet.

As the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) rightly said, women are remarkably skilled—and not just in crisis management. If they have run a home, had a job and

[Ms Jean Corston]

brought up two or more children—as many of us have—they learn about crisis management, budgeting, long-term planning, dispute resolution, conflict avoidance and critical path analysis. Some big companies spend vast amounts of money on training and instilling those skills in their senior managers. But those skills, as women's skills, are not regarded as particularly valuable—that is a great loss to business and society.

It is not right to say that women work for pin money. When I was first married, most women did not work, but most men earned a wage that allowed them to support their wives and children and pay the mortgage. Increasingly, as wages are driven down, women have to work. Many women say to me, "You were lucky to have that choice. It is not available to me. I had to go back to work as soon as I possibly could simply to help my husband pay the mortgage."

Lone mothers fare particularly badly. The Department of Social Security's research report No. 25, of 1994, is entitled "Lone Parents and Work". That Government report found that nearly all lone parents are women; only 23 per cent. of them are in full-time work and of those with a child under five, only 9 per cent. are in work. The typical net earnings of those women amount to £130 a week and one fifth of them in full-time jobs take home less than £80. It is undoubtedly true that affordable child care is beyond their reach and they use all sorts of informal means to help them look after their children. We would not necessarily approve of all those methods, as they do not provide the sort of stimulation that children require in order to develop. Those women need a minimum wage and decent job training.

Mr. Coe: In the past few minutes, the hon. Lady—like the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell)—has laid considerable stress on the importance of a minimum wage. At what level would she introduce it?

Ms Corston: What is important about a minimum wage is that it sets a floor under wages. Will the hon. Gentleman go to Falmouth and Camborne and tell good employers that they are subsidising bad employers through the taxation system by topping up low pay with family credit to the tune of £2 billion, which is an utter disgrace?

A minimum wage would not destroy jobs. There is no evidence of that anywhere. A minimum wage would put a floor under wages. The rate will be announced by the next Labour Government when we take office. The Tories do not tell the British public the truth about the economy. To find out whether that is right or wrong, one has only to remember the mess that Conservative Governments left for Labour Governments to mop up every time they left office.

Mrs. Lait: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Corston: No. I should make progress. I shall give way later.

Poverty dogs women into old age. *[Interruption.]* The Minister may find that funny, but it is true. Women are much less likely to have occupational pensions. The career breaks that they take to bring up children make it difficult for them to build up entitlement to pensions, and they often pay the reduced rate of national insurance. In many cases, their pay is so low that they cannot take out private pensions.

The 1975 scheme that was introduced by a Labour Government represented a partnership between the state and private sectors. When the scheme matured 25 years later, it would have substantially reduced the risk of poverty, especially for women and one of the blights of our age—the severe impoverishment of older women, especially those over 75—would have been overcome. Women were to be awarded pensions on the basis of paid work and their caring work in the family. Not only does the Pensions Act 1995 phase in an increase in women's pension age, but the withdrawal from SERPS will increase the numbers of women who are forced into poverty. From 1988, the 20-years rule was abandoned, so periods of low earnings because of caring responsibilities can no longer be ignored.

I refer the House to an early-day motion tabled this week by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson). It relates to a woman in her constituency who is 59 years old and has married for the second time having previously been married for 22 years. Her second husband is nine years younger than her, so she will have no entitlement to a pension until she is 75. Had she not married him, she would be entitled to £19 a week on the basis of her first husband's contributions. During 22 years of marriage, she looked after the home and cared for four children while paying a reduced stamp. By the age of 75, she will have lost £14,000. That is a huge sum of money for older women on low pay.

One of the greatest problems is that women are not treated as individuals in their own right for pension purposes, but as adjuncts to their husbands or men with whom they have live-in relationships.

At Beijing the Government reaffirmed a commitment to the

"equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women",

but we are the only European Union country not to have a commitment to parental leave.

The all-party group on parenting, of which I am an officer, heard evidence for four weeks in the summer of 1994. At panel hearings, we consulted a broad spectrum of individuals and organisations representing parents, businesses, banks and the Churches. They all said how important it was to involve men in caring for children.

One of our recommendations was for parental leave. That was endorsed by the Conservative Members on the all-party group who saw evidence of the need for it. The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who was on the panel, was also committed to that statement. It was unfortunate for him that he was appointed a Whip on the day that the report was published. I appreciate that it must have caused him some embarrassment, but he supported the recommendation at the time.

One of the most imaginative documents that I saw was produced in 1985 by the Swedish Government, who stated that they had the responsibility not only to increase the participation of women in the labour market on an equal basis, but to ensure that children were not located in a world of women. They stressed the importance of labour market measures to enable men to discharge their responsibilities as fathers and carers, because that was good for men, children and families.

If the responsibility for children is to be shared more equally, there has to be decent and affordable child care. The Government's nursery vouchers are likely to threaten provision for three-year-olds in the local authority sector. I recently met governors and parents—primarily women—at a nursery school called The Limes in my constituency. It is currently run by Avon county council and from next month it will be run by the Bristol unitary authority. Those people were concerned that the nursery education provided for three-year-olds through the "high scope" scheme, which encourages self-discipline, co-operation and an imaginative approach to learning, may well be threatened by the provision of vouchers for four-year-olds. Those vouchers are likely to help only the better-off. I welcome Labour's commitment to nursery education for three and four-year-olds.

Mrs. Gillan: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Corston: No. The Minister spoke for nearly 50 minutes and the Government will have the opportunity to reply to the debate. I have only a short speech, although I may give way later if the Minister will listen.

The Beijing declaration also stated that we were determined to

"prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls".

However, the fear of crime among women is reaching massive proportions. The 1992 British crime survey showed that 49 per cent. of women feel unsafe walking alone at night, seven out of 10 women lock their car doors when driving alone during the day and at night and two thirds of women are afraid of parking in multistorey car parks. A 1994 MORI poll shows that four out of five women said that their fear of crime had "increased a lot" in recent years.

Women are told to say indoors, but in 1991 almost half of all assaults were classified as domestic incidents. Women are likely to be assaulted at home, but they are frightened of going out, so they are entitled to ask where they are safe. Although we need refuges—we still do not have the number of refuges recommended by the Select Committee on Violence in Marriage in 1975—and sensitive and prompt police procedures, that is only half the solution.

We should also underpin local authorities' zero tolerance campaigns.

In a recent debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) told the House about Edinburgh's zero tolerance campaign, which sounded marvellous. Public information made it absolutely clear that violence against partners and children was utterly unacceptable male behaviour that should stop.

Mrs. Peacock: I agree with the hon. Lady. My local authority has a zero tolerance campaign. As I said in my speech, as women and mothers, we have to educate our very small boys that violence is not acceptable. Only if we start right at the beginning, will we have any hope of preventing them from going out into the world when they are older and beating up their own wives and partners, or perhaps an elderly lady. That supports the view that mothers should stay at home with their children, at least in the early years.

Ms Corston: I could not agree more. It is obviously vital that we teach children as young as possible that they should respect each other and do not have the right to assault other people. It is also important to make it possible for families to function in that way—not all families do. That is one reason why families should be at the heart of Government policy. It is inappropriate that zero tolerance campaigns are left to cash-strapped local authorities. There should be more than a video, a pamphlet or a statement announcing a campaign: national campaign material should be distributed making it clear that the macho culture—which I deplore—must not extend to relationships within the home.

Beijing also agreed that women should have access to power, which involves confronting the institutional nature of sexism and of racism. The Labour party has attempted to do that by increasing the representation of women in Parliament. I welcome that move. After the next election, there will be 80 or 90 women of remarkably high calibre on the Labour side. People will see how they contribute to our parliamentary process, and they will say, "Why weren't women like that elected before? Perhaps it was because it was a male-dominated place with entrenched barriers to women. It was high time that a political party acknowledged that institutionalised sexism."

Mrs. Gillan: Does the hon. Lady agree that the barriers were not in this place but in the Labour constituency parties? They forced the Labour party to select women candidates and to discriminate against men, thereby breaking the very legislation that Labour is so proud of having introduced.

Ms Corston: A resounding majority of Labour party members voted for the measure two years running. More importantly, the Minister cannot preach to us about women Members of Parliament: the Conservatives have only 19 and they will have even fewer after the next election.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The Conservatives could not even keep the ones they had: one female Member of Parliament crossed the Floor.

Ms Corston: Indeed.

I do not want to suggest that it has been all downhill since women were given the vote and began to have equal access to the professions. My daughter is a doctor and she is the first woman to achieve professional qualifications in my or her father's families. However, isolated instances such as that do not reveal the situation of all women.

In the past few weeks, the Home Affairs Select Committee—of which I have the honour to be a member—has heard evidence from the following organisations: the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the Building Societies Association, the British Bankers Association, the British Retail Consortium, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the National Consumer Council, Justice, Liberty and the Data Protection Registrar. I am pleased to say that all those organisations were represented by women—that would not have been the case 10 or 20 years ago—and it was interesting to note the surprise expressed by my male colleagues on the Committee.

I dare say that some of those women will come up against glass ceilings. We must not reproduce patterns of inequality by pulling up the ladder and saying that,

[Ms Corston]

because some women have at long last begun to enter the professions—even if at low levels—everything has been achieved. By doing so, we ignore the reality of the lives of millions of our female constituents: reinforcing inequalities between women is no substitute for providing equal opportunities for all women.

I am very glad that the Government have been shamed into holding a debate on women's issues in their own time during International Women's Week. The Labour party initiated such debates two years ago during International Women's Week and on both occasions Labour Members have done their best to raise issues that concern women. Labour's parliamentary record in that regard cannot be matched on the Government side. I welcome the debate.

6.13 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. My contribution will be brief: I understand that we must not detain the House, as the socialists are giving a party to which we are all invited. Therefore, we obviously do not wish to debate the subject on the Adjournment until 10 pm.

I congratulate the Government on all that they have achieved in enabling women to participate fully in the public, political and the commercial life of this country. We should recognise that great strides have been made in the past few years in creating a climate in which women have benefited from the training and the opportunities that have enabled them to fulfil their potential and to play a part in all aspects of our society.

It is a matter of record that our head of state is a woman and that the head of the established Church is a woman—although obviously it is the same woman. Until relatively recently, a woman was our head of Government, Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party—and what an excellent leader she was. Women are represented in the Cabinet—on the basis of merit and not tokenism, I hasten to add—and in every tier of government.

Within the Conservative party, it is a matter of fact that the overwhelming majority of local activists are women and that women hold key positions in many local associations. The leader of my local council is a woman, although she does not share my political views. Based upon my experience of political life and my career to date, I must confess that I have found doors that are open for women but not for men. The courtesy that gentlemen Members extend to those of my gender is much appreciated—long may it continue. Vive la difference, as our French colleagues might say.

As one who is honoured to serve on Madam Speaker's Chairmen's Panel, I welcome the fact that, for the first time in our history, the Speaker is a woman. That sends a clear message and stands as an excellent example to women that they can, on the basis of their own abilities, rise to the highest office in the land.

I reject entirely the suggestion that we need more women in the House simply to ensure that women's issues receive greater priority. Like all hon. Members, I consider carefully all issues that are brought before the House and all problems that are highlighted in questions on the strength of the arguments and not according to the gender of those who raise them. I think that all hon. Members, irrespective of gender, have a duty and an obligation to represent to the best of their ability all their constituents: male and female, adults and children.

At the same time, I believe that the House should turn its attention to the urgent need to abolish entirely the Equal Opportunities Commission—a divisive and anachronistic body which has no place in a modern, civilised democracy with universal suffrage. My research, conducted through a series of parliamentary questions, has revealed that that quango—which is responsible for ending sexism in employment practices and which professes to have its own equal opportunities policy—numbers among its employees 140 women and only 30 men. That represents 82.4 per cent. and 17.6 per cent. respectively of its work force. Of the commissioners appointed to run the body, eight are women and only three are men.

We do not know yet the gender of the new Welsh commissioner who will be appointed shortly. I thought that Opposition Members would have something to say about those statistics, and I look forward to the winding-up speeches. That deplorable imbalance in the gender profile of employees and the commissioners is totally unacceptable and inconsistent with the statutory principles that the commission is supposed to uphold. As that body receives a staggering £6 million each year from the taxpayer, we have every right to expect better from it.

I say to my hon. Friend the Minister with as much courtesy as I can summon that I was dismayed by the manner in which she opened the debate, and appalled by what she had to say. When she winds up, perhaps she will explain how much more the EOC will cost taxpayers through the addition of another commissioner, and how the organisation will be financed in future.

For too long, nostrums from our discredited corporatist past have been allowed to be peddled by persons who have built an entire industry on the back of once genuine concerns about discrimination against women. It is time that the House took the bit between its teeth and acted to abolish such commissions.

In all my research to date, I have found only one other commission with a record as poor as the EOC, and it is the Commission for Racial Equality. Of its staff of 212, 62—or 29 per cent.—are from the main white ethnic group that constitutes more than 94 per cent. of the population, while 150 of the CRE's staff—or 71 per cent.—are from ethnic minorities. That hardly sets a good example to other employers, particularly when closer examination reveals that, even among the ethnic employees, Asians are discriminated against in favour of black employees on a sixfold basis.

The CRE, which consumes a staggering £16 million of taxpayers' money every year, is doing a disservice to women and men from ethnic and indigenous populations alike. If the two commissions were scrapped, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer would immediately have £22 million extra to spend on creating genuine opportunities for women in society through the provision of more nursery places, reviewing child benefit, providing better breast cancer screening and a myriad of other practical and concrete ways. One of them was highlighted in an effective intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter).

Before I was selected as the prospective parliamentary candidate for Congleton and eventually elected, I enjoyed some of the happiest and most fulfilling days of my life

as a wife and mother. In our wish to ensure commercial and political success for women, let us never forget the vital role that wives perform in supporting their husbands—and their more vital role in nurturing their children. I am a wife, a mother of three children and a grandmother of six—and I am sure that there is potential for more. I am as proud of those personal achievements and those of my children as I am of the professional achievements that I have had the good fortune to experience.

Young women leaving school and college today are far brighter and more confident, and are better prepared for life, than we were. However, they should never feel pressured into pursuing a career if that is not their wish. In many societies throughout the world, there is no more honoured an individual than a mother. Her role is deeply rewarding and fulfilling, although a little taxing at times. Society should acknowledge the great service done by the mothers of the nation, whose vocation is one to pursue with pride.

6.24 pm

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): I am delighted that the House has the opportunity to debate equal opportunities for women in a week that celebrates International Women's Day. A belief in equality of opportunity for all is a cornerstone of my philosophy as a Liberal Democrat. There is much agreement in all parts of the House on the measures needed to ensure equality of opportunity for women. One area of disagreement is how far that objective has been met.

When I was younger, I was told the riddle about a man and his son who were out driving. Their car was involved in a terrible accident. The father was killed and the son was rushed to hospital for an emergency operation. The surgeon looked at the child and said, "I cannot perform the operation. This boy is my son." My children do not see the point of that story, because they accept that the surgeon could be the boy's mother.

The statistics suggest that equality has not advanced far, because 96 per cent. of top-grade surgeons are men. It is not as if women do not enter the health service. Of 420,000 nurses, 360,000 are women. The traditional dividing line of the sexes can still be seen throughout the national health service. Fifty-eight per cent. of assistant general practitioners are women, but only 24 per cent. are principal GPs. Eighty per cent. of nurses and midwives are women, but only 24 per cent. of dentists are women. Nurses and midwives do not earn as much money as people working in other parts of the NHS.

A similar pattern is found in other professions. Nearly half of university administrative staff are women, but only one quarter are junior lecturers—and only one in 20 is a professor. One sixth of police constables are women, but only one of the 103 chief and deputy chief constables is a woman.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Does the hon. Lady accept that a person cannot suddenly be appointed to a senior post without working his or her way through the ranks and gaining experience? If one wants an accurate measure of current trends, one should look at progress in lower age groups. For example, among solicitors aged below 30, more are women than men.

Mrs. Maddock: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point, but I was reviewing the current situation, which shows that there is still inequality in some professions.

Last year, I asked a number of parliamentary questions to establish the proportion of women civil servants in various grades. The answers from the different Departments totalled 21,000 deskbound civil servants, but fewer than 3,000 of them were women. When I checked again last summer, I found that, of the 30 permanent secretaries, only two were women and neither was running a Ministry of her own. It is a case of too many Humphreys and not enough dames.

Today, the Hansard Society published a report called "Women at the Top: Progress after Five Years", and the news was not as good as many people would have liked or had hoped. On average—and we have heard some statistics already—women working full time are still paid only 79 per cent. per hour of what their male counterparts earn.

Mrs. Gillan: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Maddock: I shall give way when I have reached the end of this section. I am sure that the Minister's point will still be relevant.

A large majority of those earning less than half the national average wage are women. The majority of pensioners on income support, and 90 per cent. of lone parents, are women. The vast majority of those with primary responsibility for caring for children or the elderly and sick are women, again often on very low incomes.

Mrs. Gillan: I wished to raise a point about the Hansard Society report, which was delivered to my desk this morning, and I was delighted to receive it. The report is not all doom and gloom. The Hansard Society's press release says that women now have a better chance of top jobs and appointments, but there is "no room for relaxation." That is very good news and the hon. Lady should welcome it. Women have a better chance, and that means that the improvements I mentioned are kicking in throughout society.

Mrs. Maddock: I do not dispute that, but the point that I was making was that many of us were disappointed that the figures were not better, because we have tried to improve the situation for some years, and some of us are a little frustrated that improvement is not as fast as we would like.

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Minister has just said that the report said that women now have a better chance. Surely the news is not as good as she would lead us to believe, because women have only a better chance in contrast to what was no chance at all.

Mrs. Maddock: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention. It is still the case that, although women constitute 44 per cent. of the United Kingdom work force, they represent only 20 per cent. of managers and 2 per cent. of senior executives. The situation is still not good.

Of course, inequality is not just present in the workplace, but enshrined in law. I wish to raise a problem that was alluded to by the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) earlier. In my constituency recently, I came across a lady called Helen MacGregor. Her situation

[Mrs. Maddock]

shows how the tax system still works against women. The additional personal tax allowance that is given to married men whose wives are disabled cannot be claimed by married women whose husbands are disabled. The amount involved is £1,720—nearly £2,000. The allowance is to be uprated this year.

Helen MacGregor, my constituent, works as a part-time veterinary assistant. Her husband is severely disabled and confined to a wheelchair. If she were the one in the wheelchair, her husband would be entitled to the additional personal allowance, but as things stand, she is not. That seems to me to be blatant sexual discrimination by the Treasury and the Government.

The legislation dates back to the time when it was assumed that every wife stayed at home looking after the children and the allowance was supposed to compensate husbands of disabled women for the cost of employing a housekeeper. The Secretary of State for Health, when he was the Financial Secretary, admitted that, if we were starting from scratch today, the Government would not have invented any allowance that went only to men. The Secretary of State for Transport, when he was Financial Secretary, said that he agreed that it was anomalous that a married man with children whose wife was totally incapacitated was able to claim the additional personal allowance, whereas a wife in similar circumstances could not.

The present Financial Secretary, in Committee on the Finance Bill last month, told my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) that he recognised that the provision might well be regarded as anachronistic, but the Government did not promise to do anything about it. In correspondence with me, the Government have hinted openly that they will abolish the allowance for men too, if people make too much fuss. That would not encourage carers to go out to work.

If we can obtain some support today from both sides of the House for the extension of the allowance to women—the matter has been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House in the past few years—I hope that we shall push the Government into doing away with such disgraceful and blatant discrimination.

Finance is one of the real drawbacks in equality of opportunity for women, especially in pensions. The lack of pension provision for some women has been mentioned already. Two thirds of those over retirement age and four fifths of those over 85 are women. Women have borne the brunt of the decline in value of the state pension in relation to earnings. Women who spend time at home caring for children or older people often forfeit their full state entitlement, because they forgo the opportunity to make full national insurance contributions. Yet, as I think we all agree, the work they do is no less valid.

Because women sometimes spend years out of employment, or because they are working part time, they have much less chance to make decent pension provision, whether in occupational or in personal pensions. Therefore, women are much more reliant than men on the state pension, but 85 per cent. of women do not receive a full state pension. In fact, half of all women pensioners live on less than £50 a week and the current pension safety net is simply not adequate for many pensioners, who are overwhelmingly women. We need to change the system so that a pension is based not on contributions, but on residency.

I welcome some of the comments that have been made today about splitting pensions when couples divorce. I hope that our debate today will have some force in persuading the Government to support the amendments that were made in another place.

Another real problem for women is part-time work. Women lose out and they get a bad deal, because more than half of the women who go out to work do so on a part-time basis. More than 5 million women work part time in Britain, compared with 1 million men. In the past, many of those jobs have been traditional jobs for women, such as cleaning and waiting, but increasingly part-time work has spread to cover almost every area of work.

Part-time workers lose in a number of ways. On average, they earn less pro rata than their full-time counterparts. They are generally more insecure than full-timers, partly as a result of the rules governing redundancy. Because part-timers are more likely than full-timers to stay in the same job for less than two years, they generally have less recourse to employment law. Part-time workers get less training than full-time workers and they have fewer opportunities to progress up the career ladder. A TUC survey recently found that 41 per cent. of people working fewer than 20 hours a week received no training at all. Overwhelmingly, it is women who are losing in that way.

On Tuesday this week, my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) introduced a Bill to deal with the lack of any statutory paid holiday entitlement for part-time workers—one of the greatest injustices they face. Britain is unique among European Union countries in offering no legal right to paid annual leave for part-time employees. Women who try to do their best to look after their families have great difficulty when their children are on holiday. Many part-time workers are given a pitiful amount of holiday time, if they get any at all. They often face uncertainty right up to the last minute as to whether they can take any leave. That particularly affects women, with their important caring role.

That problem acts as a deterrent to many women thinking of taking up part-time work or jobs generally. Part of the solution lies in employers learning to value part-time workers more. There is a great deal that the Government can do. Next week, we shall be unveiling our Liberal Democrat guarantee for part-time workers: a set of 11 measures that would result in better-paid, more highly skilled and more contented work forces. That would represent a huge boost for the 5 million women in part-time work and the many more who would like to be, but who are denied the opportunity because of the difficulties associated with current practices.

One reason why so many women take up part-time instead of full-time employment is the difficulty they would face fitting in full-time work with their family responsibilities. An eight-hour day is difficult enough; is it any wonder, therefore, that we find it difficult to persuade women to enter Parliament, where we certainly do more than an eight-hour day? We have heard a great deal about the difficulties of getting women on short-lists, but I think that many women are not attracted here in the first place because they believe that it is a male-dominated society. Having been here for nearly three years, I agree with

them. Many women have told me that they are more interested in working for outside bodies or local councils, because the atmosphere there is better and they can get on and do things. They see this place as a talking shop, not a place of action.

Financial affairs remain an area that presents obstacles to equality of opportunity for women; breaking into male-dominated circles is another. During my time here, we have occasionally debated how to get more women into Parliament, and I do not propose to go into detail about that tonight. I must reiterate, however—things have changed in the past year—the Liberal Democrat view that our system of political representation works against more women coming to Parliament.

A much better way to get them here would be to change our voting system in favour of one that encouraged a wider range of candidates generally. Our first-past-the-post system fails to offer political parties any incentive to promote a balanced ticket, in terms of gender, race and so on, of candidates. Systems of proportional representation used by other European countries almost always result in more women being elected, as well as in a fairer division of seats among the political parties.

In Denmark, for instance, 33 per cent. of Members of Parliament are women, and in Germany, 20 per cent. are, but in the United Kingdom, only 9 per cent. are women. To help with the problem of accountability to constituents, a single transferable vote system would encourage political parties to put up more women candidates, and would allow voters a choice between candidates of the same party, thereby allowing people who wanted to vote for a woman candidate to do so. At the same time, they could list their party preferences—

Mrs. Ann Winterton: The hon. Lady is making a very important point. Has she considered its implications? She would succeed only in destroying the single-Member constituency system, which means that, once a Member is elected, he or she is responsible for representing all constituents, irrespective of his or her party. The other result would be that more power would be centralised in the hands of the party hierarchy. Is that really what she wants?

Mrs. Maddock: I do not agree. In my part of the country, Dorset, I am the only Opposition Member and the only woman Member. Some people want to be represented both by a woman and by another party. Multi-Member constituencies would allow the people of Dorset that choice. After all, it is done successfully elsewhere, and a growing number of people here think that it would be a good idea.

Members of my party—a minority party—often get taken to task for speaking too long in these debates, as I fear I did the last time I spoke. I shall therefore draw my remarks to a conclusion. It is important that all our parties develop policies to promote women in our parties and in other organisations, and encourage them to participate. That goes for fair elections, not just to Parliament but to other bodies. My party uses the single transferable vote for elections to all tiers of the party, which results in a fair representation of women running the party at all levels. We need to encourage women to be confident, and we must ensure that they have the training and skills to fulfil themselves and to achieve real equality of opportunity.

There are still many anomalies in our tax and benefits system, of the type that I mentioned earlier. I have heard some encouraging speeches in today's debate, and I hope that a commitment will emerge from it, on both sides of the House and particularly from Ministers, to look again at the case of my constituent, Helen MacGregor, and at all the other problems in our tax and benefits system. We are all in favour of equality of opportunity and against blatant discrimination in legislation. That is why I hope that the Minister who winds up will offer the House a commitment to think again about those problems. That would indeed be a practical achievement to emerge from International Women's Day.

6.48 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): We were told at the beginning of the debate that this is the third time we have debated equal opportunities for women. These debates are beginning to give me the creeps. They seem to suggest that women are a different species, not just people like everyone else. I hope that this is the last time we hold such a debate, and that we can then begin to be treated as equals here. That would be no bad thing.

I do not deny that women do not always get a fair crack of the whip in some aspects of national life. I have introduced at least five 10-minute Bills to try to improve the number of women in the House; to help women who cohabit but are discriminated against in law; and to do something about women who want to earn a bit of money by letting out rooms to lodgers without being done by the tax man or some other inspector. There are many practical, sensible things that we in this House can do to improve the lot of women.

I do not deny that there is chauvinism in the House. Indeed, I sat here this afternoon and heard the deputy leader of the Labour party make some very sexist remarks about me—and agist remarks too—very loudly. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] Yes: he commented on my age. I do not want to repeat it, because I do not want to embarrass the right hon. Gentleman more than I already have. I hope that he will apologise at the Dispatch Box for what he said. I know that the women on the Opposition Benches will give him a hard time for it—and rightly, too.

I should like to deal with some of the clichés, the old canards and—I hate to say—sacred cows that come up every time we have one of these debates. First, there is the 76p an hour point, and how women are always being behind men in the wages struggle. When we talk about hourly rates, we are not comparing like with like. If one examines the statistics for women who have the same career pattern as men, the same professional qualifications and have worked for the same time, one finds that they receive the same rates for the job as men, just as we do in the House.

Although it may be true that the average wage for women is 76p an hour, it does not necessarily mean anything. The balance of pay between a man and a woman in a comparable job is slewed by the number of individuals who work different hours, and so on. We keep on hearing the old chestnut that women are not doing as well, of which we all have to be aware, yet it is not always true.

It is not true either that women work only for money. People do not work just for money—they work because it gets them out of the home as well. Perhaps they are

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

sometimes prepared to work for a little less money because the work is more flexible and they can get time off to look after the children or take them to the dentist. All those factors are taken into account when evaluating a job.

Sometimes, by pressing the business of equal pay, women end up losing out. The Equal Opportunities Commission, which my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) has already mentioned, has greatly damaged women by insisting that absolutely everything in employment is identical for men and women. It has often forced women who had the option to take time off to suit their family needs into exactly the same work pattern as men, including night shifts, handling unpleasant and dirty materials, and other jobs that they do not want to do.

Statistics show that, when equal work conditions for police officers were introduced and women had to work night shifts, the police force lost many women officers because they were not prepared to work the hours. The Equal Opportunities Commission secured that privilege for women, but I do not think that those women thought that it was a privilege at all. When we in this House meddle and try to make everything seem equal, we often do not do women a good turn at all.

When we hear that 12 million women are in work—jolly good job, too—we should remember that the jobs were given to them not by Parliament but by employers. Opposition Members always excoriate employers, as if they are cruel, unkind and beastly to their employees. Employers choose to employ women partly because of their skills. The nature of work has changed. Work used to be in the old smokestack industries, which were not conducive to women. Who wanted to shovel coal into a furnace all day long, bash lumps of metal around or do heavy labour?

Nowadays, the market is coming to women. Women are much better, much more dextrous and more skilled at using modern technological equipment, and are very prominent in assembly industries involving the microtechnology that we all take for granted these days. In fact, one could say that the market, not politicians, and certainly not the Equal Opportunities Commission, is providing women with opportunities to work.

Every time the Equal Opportunities Commission takes some poor employer through a show trial where a woman makes £30,000 or £300,000 out of her employer and it gets all over the papers, believe me, an awful lot of employers say to themselves, "I won't put myself in that position." Employers, especially small employers, cannot afford the sums of money awarded by the tribunal, and think twice before employing women. If a show trial is—perhaps—to do with women and pregnancy, employers might think twice about taking on a young woman.

When we crow about new regulations and protection for women, we should realise that, although we may think that they are a good idea, the person giving out the job is not a politician, and has to accommodate his profit and loss accounts. If he cannot afford, as is proposed, to give three months leave in a year to any parent of a child under eight years old—if the parent happens to have four children, compassionate leave could amount to a whole year off—he will think twice about employing women in that relevant age bracket.

Of course, that is good for us older women—there will be more jobs for us—but it does not help women generally. All the do-goodery and self-congratulation in which we indulge in this place often has the opposite effect from that we intend.

I want to say a good word for employers, because they very rarely hear it in the House. We should remind ourselves that we should be a little more humble when we are dictating terms that affect them. Very few of us in this place have had the opportunity to create employment.

Ms Corston: Does the hon. Lady support the Employers for Child Care blueprint?

Mrs. Gorman: The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that I have not yet read the document, but I shall make a great effort to do so, since she has brought it to my attention.

The state is one of the most reactionary of all employers—right from the very bottom in the health service to the top, where, as we recently witnessed in papers, a highly qualified woman who was next in line to be a representative in one of the Ministries abroad, Pauline Neville—

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Jones.

Mrs. Gorman: What? Jones? Pauline Neville-Jones, that will do. She should have been next in line to work for the Foreign Office in—I think—Paris, and it tried to dump her in Bonn. She has now got a much better job outside the civil service.

I am old enough to remember that women teachers used to be dumped as soon as they were married. A commercial employer, however, looks for the best value for money from the people he employs, who are very often, and increasingly, women.

The people who have given real equal opportunities to women are the men who invented the washing machine, the vacuum cleaner and the contraceptive pill. All those things emancipated women from the drudgery of looking after the family home—scrubbing, cleaning, ironing until the small hours, scraping potatoes, cooking for hours and hours. Thank God for the ready-food industry, oven-ready chips, and Marks and Spencer's meals. They have emancipated me and given me my equal opportunity to add my fourpen'orth to this debate.

The guru of the left, Simone de Beauvoir, a great writer on women's affairs, said in "The Second Sex" that capitalism had done more to emancipate women and grant them equal opportunities than socialism. I thought that Opposition Members would like to know that. Perhaps they would like to pick up a copy from the Library.

Mr. Rowe: In the vein of my hon. Friend's argument, may I suggest that she might like to put another plaque on the well-known statue "the burghers of Calais", which is on the lawn outside the House of Lords, saying "the hamburgers of Westminster"?

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. I deplore the fact that there is not a single statue in the House of any of the women who have contributed to it over the years. Until very recently, the

picture of Lady Astor, the first woman to take a seat in the House, hung outside the men's lavatories in the basement, until we kicked up merry hell about it.

It took a little exhibition last year to celebrate 70 years since we had been given the vote, which I helped to stage with hon. Members from all parties, to get a little plaque put up in the Lobby coming up from Westminster Hall to acknowledge the fact that the suffragettes had to hammer on the door of the House before they were allowed in to speak to their Members of Parliament. That is all wonderful stuff. I recognise that the suffragettes did a wonderful job, but they did not get us into this place in great numbers.

Many women are still trying to get into the House. There is the old canard, "How are we to get women into the House of Commons?" Like women Labour Members, I do not believe in positive discrimination. We know that male Labour Members similarly do not agree with that approach. They do not believe in that positive discrimination stuff, as we well know. If we are to have more women in this place, we must change the franchise.

I disagree with the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock)—what did she advocate?

Mrs. Maddock: The single transferable vote.

Mrs. Gorman: I do not like the STV. I have, however, advocated the view of Bernard Shaw, who was a socialist, that we should have a male and a female Member for every constituency. That does not mean doubling the number of Members in this place. Instead, it means in each constituency having all-men and all-women lists. That would remove the sexist battle.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will my hon. Friend recognise that, in south-east Cheshire, we already have that system?

Mrs. Gorman: My hon. Friend's example is one of perfection. I do not say that it is necessary to marry the bloke in the next-door constituency, although he may be a desirable person.

There are ways of bringing desirable ends to fruition instead of whingeing about women as if they are another species to whom we must do good. That is too defensive.

Women are becoming more equal, or getting better deals out of society, partly because of medical advances. I have already mentioned the pill. Everyone in this place, if not soon throughout the world, knows that I advocate hormone replacement treatment for older women. It is something that keeps them firing on all cylinders, as I hope I am doing now.

Women bear the burden of child rearing. But they do not want to become worn out, exhausted and unable to do very much else except go into decline. It is not necessary now to take that course. A woman can enjoy the best years of her life in post-menopausal age. At the same time, HRT will save her from osteoporosis, heart attacks, strokes and all the other horrible things that might happen. Medical developments have done much to help women. I dare say that many of these advances have been brought about by men. I have nothing against men—in fact, I quite like them.

There has been a change in the role of women. We were household drudges. When were we able to come out and do so much stuff in public life? Most of the great women who achieved enormous things in the past as writers, explorers and even as scientists, like Marie Curie, were not married. Even fewer of them had children to raise. As has been said, the raising of children is an immensely important occupation for women, and one that should not be denigrated. We should not belittle women who choose it as their career.

In the past, however, we have been chattels. We were not allowed to inherit. As soon as we married, we were treated as if everything that we owned belonged to our husbands. We did not have proper pensions. By and large, we were tied to the kitchen sink or the typist's chair. The typist's chair, of course, has become one of the most important areas of an office. Being in command of the word processor and the computer gives a woman control over all the men who are working in the office, because they are desperate to obtain information, and it is all tucked up in the computer. In that situation, men had better be nice to women.

A good computer programmer is worth her weight in gold. Salaries for women in that sector are on a par with those for men. We have talked already about education, which in this context has brought up women. We must not forget, however, that the majority of women—this applies to the majority of men—will not have great educational achievements. But let us say something nice about those who do the routine jobs in society, and give them a little praise for what they do.

Are the majority of women not household drudges in some ways? To enhance the role of women, it is time we started considering ways to help women who want to go out to work to offset some of the costs involved. I have advocated more than once in this place that employers, in a domestic context or in any other, should be able to offset the wage or salary paid against their gross income. There should be an offset not against the individual's income, if he or she is spending money for home help, child help or help with elderly relatives, but against family income.

If we treated the family as a small plc, which could employ others and which could offset the ensuing costs against its gross income, we would enhance family life. We would create advantages for those who decide to become a married family. That is a modern way of enhancing that role in society.

We shall never return to the days when women just remained at home looking after the children. I accept, of course, that there are voices in the House who advocate that the clock should be put back. In reality, however, women want to be able to get outside the home and do other things. That means providing opportunities for women to get out of the home, and providing jobs in the home. I note that the Opposition Chief Whip is frowning as he listens to my proposal. It is clear that he considers it a barmy idea. He should reflect that my proposed scheme is being implemented in Denmark and France.

In France, as is made clear in this 'ere article now before me, over 1 million people have taken advantage of the scheme. It is simple. It begins with someone wanting to employ someone. If the job is modest and not well paid, the state pays the insurance stamp.

The scheme has brought enormous numbers of people out of the black economy. If people are employed and paid, there is an advantage in paying tax. I would not like to know how many people in this country employ daily helps and window cleaners, for example, for cash. It is

[Mrs. Gorman]

better to put such moneys through the family account. Job opportunities are enhanced for many people who are low in skill level but want an occupation.

Mrs. Lait: Has my hon. Friend calculated the costs in France and in the United Kingdom of employers having to pay a statutory minimum wage, which I believe in France is about £200 a week?

Mrs. Gorman: I take my hon. Friend's point. The cost might frighten the life out of people and lead them to the conclusion that they could not afford it.

I hate the idea that we must denigrate those who work for £2 an hour. If that is all they are worth because they are not highly skilled, or if they are willing to accept that rate of pay because the person offering the job cannot afford to pay any more—that may well be the position of someone employing a domestic help in the home—whose business is it but theirs? In this context, we are not talking about jobs in large organisations, companies that may be able to pay relatively high starting rates because of their profit levels.

Our desire to shove up starting rates of pay often does harm, not only to women who need to take their place on the jobs ladder to recover their skills and move on to other occupations, but to youngsters, who often demand wages that are almost akin to those of adults with experience. The result is unemployment.

When I ran my own company, I employed women as cleaners. They offered their services as cleaners because those were the jobs on offer. As I was able to assess their abilities, some of them ended up working in the office. Many became managers of departments. That happened because they had the opportunity to start. With a vacancy only for a cleaner, it would be no good if some socialist politician said, "You can't pay the woman that rate—you must pay her more." That might mean doing away with the job and making do with one cleaner instead of two.

As soon as we start establishing employment rules, we are interfering in a human relationship that is so dependent on the employer's ability to find money for a job to be done. The Equal Opportunities Commission is a daft organisation. It pretends that it is acting to help women when it should be understood that jobs are provided by the private sector, by the market and by the change in the nature of work that is now taking place.

Ms Glenda Jackson: The hon. Lady was concerned that there should be no interference in relations between employer and employee. Several recent cases have been highlighted in the press of women who have come to Britain, usually with foreign families, who are virtually slaves. They may receive no money; they have no lives of their own, and are often severely maltreated. Surely in such a situation, the hon. Lady would not argue for no interference. Do not such relations between employer and employee cry out for some sort of interference?

Mrs. Gorman: I take the hon. Lady's point. There is an element of good sense in that. If people are being physically maltreated, the law should take its course. People who work in a foreign country and do not speak the language are vulnerable. The sooner such women find their way to the many refuges, which are often run voluntarily and not by the state, that will help them, the better.

Although I have never employed someone in such a capacity—and except those who do not get out of the house—such people usually know others in Britain who come from their countries. Filipinos often come in such capacities. They soon learn the ropes. Many such people end up taking their employers to industrial tribunals. Not all are put upon, although I agree that the situation the hon. Lady described is a disgrace. They should, and I am sure do, make use of the opportunities that exist to protect themselves physically.

Last but not least, the women who serve on the Front Benches are the gatekeepers. Having got there, they have the opportunity to choose from among their colleagues. They can do what women in the past have done for those of us who are here today. They will create equal opportunities among their staff, their parliamentary private secretaries and in their general circle. When the Minister replies, I should like to know how many opportunities my colleagues in the Cabinet, or those who are on their way to it—and I congratulate them—are creating.

It is easy to tell everyone else what to do, but what are we doing? In our own little empire, we have the opportunity to do something. I should like to see equal numbers of women on health service boards and other so-called public bodies. That is something we can do: we can hand out such opportunities. We do not always live up to the objectives or standards that we set for others. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, whom I congratulate on being such a fine Minister and an example to women, will deal with that.

7.12 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): It is always a pleasure to listen to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), not least for the frisson of disagreement that one always experiences.

I question some of the facts that she presented. Her opening remarks suggested that there is equal pay for work of equal value, and that the Opposition were making a great fuss about nothing. I refer to the Fawcett Society breakdown of wages for two jobs that would automatically still be regarded as the particular domain of women. A woman working in a laundry earns, on average, £140; a man £160. Among cleaners and domestics, another career for which we as women are expected to have a natural inborn talent, women earn £140 on average; men earn £200. Other speeches, and not exclusively from the Opposition, have underlined the fact that women are still undervalued and underpaid.

The hon. Member for Billericay argued that we should not denigrate people who accept a wage of £2 an hour. I would not denigrate anyone who was forced to accept £2 an hour for the only work they could obtain. I am very critical of, and would be delighted to be given the opportunity to denigrate to their faces, employers who offer that and have the audacity to call it a wage. Everyone in the Chamber knows of situations where £2 would be regarded as a less than adequate tip.

Very low rates of pay often exist for jobs that are important but are viewed as unimportant by those who pay the wages. The Fawcett Society briefing shows that

care assistants often receive very little because their work is deemed unimportant by people who define the value of work almost exclusively in terms of the wages that it can command. That is central to why women are not equal in Britain and in every other country. Such work is deemed not to require any skills, training, energy, application or imagination.

The hon. Member for Billericay will agree about, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) has mentioned, the skills that women develop in life simply by virtue of being women, from having responsibility for running houses, raising children, looking after elderly parents, and from a whole range of other matters to which women have to bring their life skills. If those skills were translated into a commercial enterprise, business, or industry and were given high-sounding titles such as management skills or crisis management, they would command a high salary.

However, such job descriptions do not exist for those essential jobs. Think of the sort of work done by a care assistant in caring for people who are often elderly, frail and confused. It is outrageous that that quality of care should be deemed to be worth only £2 an hour.

Mrs. Gorman: I guess that the great majority of care workers are employed by the state. I said that the state was one of the worst employers in respect of wages. I do not know what the figures are. Nobody makes people work for that sort of money. If they need it badly enough to take it, it is wrong for us to say that those jobs are not valid because they only get paid that amount.

Ms Jackson: To start where the hon. Lady ended, I repeat my point. I do not say that those jobs are not valid; they are vital. My point is that it is a scandal and a disgrace that they are deemed by the people who define wage scales to be worth only £2 an hour. The hon. Lady is wrong to say that most care assistants work in the state sector. As she well knows in respect of care in the community, the Government have decided that 85 per cent. of all they hand to local authorities must be spent in the private sector.

Most residential and nursing homes are outside urban areas. To pick up the hon. Lady's point about why people take such jobs, I know of a residential nursing home in a rural area. It provided the only employment opportunities for 16 to 18-year-olds because they could get to and from it. There was no public transport, and they could not get to the nearest large town. They did not have such facilities. The home offered the only employment opportunities in their area.

I am sorry to bore the House, but I repeat that it is a scandal and disgrace that the care of the elderly and frail at one end of life's time scale, and the very young at the other, should be deemed work of such little value that the people who do it are paid slave wages.

I revert to my main theme. One especially interesting theme of this debate recurs whenever we have such debates, whether they are dubbed debates about women or, as tonight, equal opportunities for women, and when the state of women is the focus of attention for one day in the year. I hope that we manage to make these debates an annual event, and that the hon. Member for Billericay does not fail to participate in them. It is that from Conservative Members we hear that things are infinitely better for women, and that, although things may be moving slowly, they are moving inevitably forward.

I argue, as do my hon. Friends, that that is not the case. Every time we have such debates, what is most grievous about the Government's argument is that they imply that it is, and always has been, an accepted state—indeed, that there is something unusual and unwarranted in saying that it is grossly unfair—that women's place in our society and in every society throughout the world is still one of marked inequity.

The hon. Member for Billericay said that capitalism was one of the motivating and advancing forces for women in the world. All I can say to that is that capitalism has done nothing to advance opportunities for women in, say, Mexico, where they may work growing flowers, and pesticides that would be banned in America, in this country and in the rest of Europe, are flooded over the fields, with all the concomitant health risks.

Capitalism has done virtually nothing for people in countries where tea or coffee, for example, offer the basic economic opportunities. Industrialised nations can dictate a guaranteed price for the crop, and if the market falls, the producer carries the burden. Capitalism has done nothing for the developing nations of the world.

However, there is one area in which women seem to be over-present—an area in which one would like to see them a little less heavily represented—in as much as it is women and their children who suffer most grievously from violence, both in domestic situations and in nation states, because of civil war or warring nation states. Most refugees and displaced people are women and children, and sometimes elderly men and women.

The United Nations report on the world's children, which I believe was published towards the end of last year, said, for the first time in any UN publication, that 75 per cent. of the world's women live on or below the poverty line—not the decency threshold, but the poverty line. The statement is somewhat cloudy and guarded; none the less, the political message is there. That means that 75 per cent. of the world's women—and, of course, their children—live in physical conditions of the most abject and degrading poverty. They have no access to education, to primary health care or even to clean water.

For the first time in any of its publications, to my knowledge, the United Nations said in the report that the world's failure to advance the cause of women could perhaps—I admit that I am paraphrasing here—be traced back to the fact that, in the legislative assemblies of the world, too few women are sitting on Benches such as these.

It has been established that the women of the world do two thirds of the world's work, while earning less than one tenth of the world's income. We also own less than 1 per cent. of the world's property. We, as a gender, make the world go round, and we have far too little voice in the direction that our world should take.

The only way in which that voice can justifiably be heard, and make a real difference, will be when those who come from half the population of the country—the female half—account for half the places on these green Benches. I hope that that day will dawn in this country. There must be more female representation in the legislative assemblies of the world. We are discussing a shift in power.

That shift would bring about genuine equality for women. It would mean that they were not burdened by the idea that they had to have a child every nine months,

[Ms Jackson]

so that, with its ability to work, each child would represent the family's insurance policy for the future. We can remove such burdens from women and create real equality, which would benefit not only women and their children but their menfolk too, and the world as a whole, only if we ensure that the legislative assemblies of the world reflect a genuine female perspective.

I do not believe that there is such a thing as a "women's issue", and I would not be interested in arguing for it if I did. But undoubtedly there is a female dimension in all of us. For far too long, the world has been governed and ruled by masculine perceptions, and has been presented as being entirely their preserve. There is a whole other area of human experience, imagination and perception that could be dubbed female, although it does not always and exclusively reside in women.

It is time for that balance to begin to percolate through, so that the world can indeed become a better and more equal place, not only for women, but for men too.

7.25 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I do not intend to follow the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), who has just made a fine contribution, in talking about the worldwide situation, although she was right to remind us of it. The Save the Children Fund and others have produced some useful practical statistics, such as the number of hours that it takes for a woman or a family to collect water, to demonstrate the imbalance between the extraordinary prosperity of countries such as ours and the poverty of the vast majority of the population of the world.

I shall confine my remarks to this country, and I begin by asking: what sort of opportunity are we really talking about? Opportunity is too often defined in the narrow terms of finance and career opportunities, as if the goal of equal opportunities were to reproduce for women the conditions that many men are at last beginning to question, and to ask whether they are appropriate priorities.

It would be sad if the achievement of greater equality of women were a one-way street. I do not want to see more women aping the least attractive characteristics of men. For example, there is evidence that young girls are increasingly forming gangs, adopting foul language and drinking to excess. Even in the House we have seen a woman Minister being subjected to abuse of a boorishness that apes the worst kind of male boorishness in this place.

Mrs. Gillan: When was that?

Mr. Rowe: The Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), was subjected to a number of exceedingly offensive remarks, which I would have thought that women seeking equal opportunity would rather have eschewed. We seem to be making rather a poor fist of adapting to our changing world.

The world is indeed changing greatly. In 1900, as my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) pointed out, 154 children in every thousand died before the age of one. The typical woman could expect 10 years between the time that her last child left home and death. Now, only 6.4 children per thousand die as infants, and the average woman will have two pregnancies or fewer and can expect to reach the age of 63 without suffering a limiting long-standing illness. She can expect many years of active life before dying at 80-plus. In those years, she may well pursue her own interests, with relatively little interaction with her children, who may live far away from her.

However, those undoubted gains have led to a host of strains, with which we are still trying to cope. First, there is the rapid increase in household instability. There are some faint signs that the rate of household break-up may be beginning to slow down—I certainly hope so—but one in three, or an even greater proportion, of marriages still end in divorce. In those circumstances, any prudent girl must ensure that she will be able to support herself financially, even if she is one of those girls—they really exist—who would prefer to rely on her spouse.

In a society in which, thanks to Conservative policies, one young person in three now enters higher education, we are confronted by a paradox: those who take such an opportunity may well not arrive in the labour market until they are at least 25. I am prepared to lay quite a good bet that that is true of the children of some hon. Members who are in the Chamber now. The creation of a pension sufficient to support them for the 30 years that could easily follow their early retirement at 50 is a subject for another debate, but it is an important question none the less.

I want to draw attention to the problems of couples who cannot even set up a household until they are 25 or 26, who are unlikely to have their first child until they are about 30 and who are faced with child care obligations just when their employers expect the maximum return on investment in education and training. I am not at all sure that child care is the best solution to the problem, given that in many instances it is provided by a succession of carers who stay for less than a year. It is, however, very difficult for an ambitious couple to know how to secure their future in employment if they take too much time off work to look after their babies.

The crux of the debate should be how we can ensure that parenting is effective without damaging our pursuit of equal opportunities for women. We are certainly not doing very well now: 750,000 children in the United Kingdom have no contact with their natural fathers. How can we possibly accept that? We press on blindly, pursuing a lopsided goal. We expect ever higher take-home pay, although for many people the home to which the pay is taken is falling apart.

As Etzioni put it,

> "The new gender equalised world was supposed to be a combination of all that was sound and ennobling in the traditional roles of women and men. Women were to be free to work any place they wanted, and men would be free to show emotion, care and domestic commitment, not supposed to mean that children would be bereft of dedicated parenting."

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I secured a 90-minute Wednesday morning Adjournment debate on the problems of parental care and working time. I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman has said so far, but does he accept that nearly every Government policy that he has supported for the past 16 years has led to exactly that pressure—the pressure to maximise take-home pay and working time, and to reduce the time in which parents can be with their children to a minimum, especially through the absence of adequate child care?

Mr. Rowe: I am sorry that I did not take part in that debate. I think, however, that the hon. Gentleman is over-crediting Governments with a capacity to affect human behaviour in that way. It seems to me that each generation, having experienced a higher standard of living in the parental home, sets itself targets that cannot be realised often. People drive themselves to seek higher incomes, larger houses and larger mortgages than is prudent. That is one reason why people find themselves in difficulty.

I accept that men are not facing up to their share of domestic commitments. In 79 per cent. of households, the washing and ironing are always or usually done by the woman alone; in only 2 per cent. of homes do men take charge of those time-consuming tasks. In 41 per cent. of homes, shopping is done exclusively by the woman. In those circumstances, it is not surprising that women are reckoned to have two hours less spare time per day than men.

There is not much point in simply seeking equality of opportunity if we are trying to drive men into the same bind as that suffered by women. Nor is there much point in women simply trying to ape the worst characteristics of male society. So far, I have dealt with the section of the population that is engaged in higher education, but what about the other end of the education ladder?

Today, the chief executive of the Office of Standards in Education drew attention to the hopelessness of young men—especially young white men—who make nothing of their education, leave school without skills or qualifications and have neither hope nor expectation of employment. That is tragedy enough, but it gets much worse. Young men in such circumstances often have a pathetic but destructively chauvinistic view of the male role. Violence, aggression, drunkenness and promiscuity—or even predatory sexuality—attract them. The results are seen partly in foreign football grounds or seaside resorts—to our national shame—and partly, and increasingly, in drug dealing or burglary to gain the cash to fuel their hungers.

In those circumstances, why should a young woman seek to draw such a man into a permanent relationship? He will spend her money and contribute little or nothing to household maintenance, and could easily knock her about. In a society that takes an extraordinarily relaxed view of promiscuity, it is easier than it once was for a woman to satisfy her sexual needs without requiring a long-term commitment. Few young women would choose such a solution, but many prefer it to the alternative. That is a challenge to all of us, and easy solutions do not exist.

Mrs. Gorman: I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that the situation must be kept in perspective. We hear about the bad cases, but four out of five children are brought up in families that stay together, at least until they are 16, and the great majority of young people—even those without skills—manage to find work when they leave school. My hon. Friend is talking about a tiny minority.

Mr. Rowe: I could not agree more, in that we are talking about a tiny minority of hooligans. I take issue with my hon. Friend, however. This is one of those instances in which the national average conceals a serious problem. In several parts of the country, only a few young men are capable of obtaining employment, and that has bred a culture in which they do not even expect to find it. They do not try at school, and in many cases they are taught very badly. As a consequence, they are caught in a spiral that was demonstrated very well in a television programme that I watched two nights ago about drug dealing in areas such as St. Paul's in Bristol.

Let me give my hon. Friend a parallel. In the 19th century, the pressure to construct drains in our municipalities came from two sources. There was the humanitarian desire for the poor to live in better conditions, and there was the perception among the fortunate that cholera killed the fortunate as quickly as the unfortunate.

I fear that, if we do not find ways of breaking into the vicious spiral of downward aspirations, increasing crime and increasing alienation between men and women, the disease will spread. Already, many of my constituents who live in favourable circumstances are being burgled, threatened and harassed by young people whom, in a number of cases, the police recognise. Many of those young people are funding a drug habit which costs £23,000 a year. That is a lot of money to find for young people who have no prospect of employment.

I have no solutions to offer, but I have one or two suggestions. We must take a serious look at work and education patterns. Work in the United Kingdom is increasingly driven by the computer, which never sleeps, and by the global market, which is instantly accessible across every time zone. The concept of normal working hours is out of date, but employers are still clinging to the traditional shape of the working day. As a result, more and more people are staying at work for increasingly longer periods because they are required to work not only the core hours but the additional hours that are foisted upon them by the demands of the global market.

The result is an appalling burden on families, and many parents see far too little of their children. As Rob Parsons rightly put it:

"I have never heard of anyone who, on their death bed, said: 'I wish I had spent more time at the office'."

Mr. MacShane: Does the hon. Gentleman support the European social affairs directive that limits the working week to 48 hours? If he says no, as I expect he will, does he agree that it is no use wishing the end while denying the means?

Mr. Rowe: I should not like to see a directive on the working week. It is possible to get round such directives, particularly in an age when people can take their little portable computers home, where they have faxes and portable telephones. We know that half the time that is denied to children is spent at home; it is spent saying, "Don't disturb Daddy; he's busy." That is the key. I do not believe that a social directive will necessarily make any difference. I should very much like to see a concerted effort to discuss with employers and others whether the way in which working time is organised is sensible. If we can change their attitudes to the working week, we might find that we can achieve considerable advance without a directive.

Mrs. Gorman: What does the hon. Gentleman think of imposing a 40-hour week on this place so that we could get home to see our loved ones a little more often? If imposing a 40-hour week is not right for hon. Members, why do Opposition Members think that they should impose it on everyone else? Some people like working 90 hours a week.

[Mrs. Gorman]

Mr. Rowe: It is certainly true that some people like working 90 hours a week, but very many more people work 90 hours a week because their boss or their competitors work 90 hours a week. One can see that trend throughout society. There are partnerships in the City, for example, in which the partners will not take on sufficient staff because that would cut into their profits, and they expect the young people who work for them to work absurdly long hours. It would be quite salutary for those partners, one day, to ask themselves how much money they are paying out extra in tax and social security benefits to repair the damage that such working hours inflict on society.

Employers should examine more boldly such ideas as job sharing. As I represent a constituency that has many commuters, I believe that many more employers in the City, and in London generally, should consider creating out-stations for their workers. In constituencies such as mine, people could travel three or four miles to work rather than commuting to London, at a huge cost in time and energy. They could do their work perfectly well electronically, and go into London once or twice a week instead of every day. That would not be the same as working from home; most people do not want to work from home. People want the companionship, stimulation and fun of going out and meeting other people at work, but they would give their eye teeth to be able to do their work nearer home. There is a whole culture in this country that says that everybody has to sit side by side before anything gets done.

Similarly, we need seriously to examine school hours. Why do we cling to the current school hours, which chime in the worst possible way with working hours? Why do we not look at having two shifts in our schools, for example, with two groups of teachers and pupils? That might mean a long morning for some and a long afternoon for others, and parents could choose which of the two provisions suited them best.

In some cases, such a practice would lead to a much more intensive use of school premises, which are often unoccupied for a large part of the day, and to much less danger from vandalism, arson and the other problems that afflict our schools. Although such hours would lead to a much larger bill for maintenance because the plant would be used much more often, they would allow for additional resources to enable the schools to have much better equipment and general provision. That idea is worth examining.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Has the hon. Gentleman considered the pattern of the school year and the long summer holiday? As I understand it, that pattern originated with the need for the children to be released to help get in the harvest. We have moved on, on the whole, from the time when that was a pressing requirement. The traditional pattern, which everyone has to put up with, is extremely inconvenient for families, particularly for women.

Mr. Rowe: That is a very good point, and it starkly raises the question of the periods that hon. Members work. As I understand it, the long summer break was partly occasioned by the desire of many hon. Members to go shooting grouse, which is a desirable occupation but one for which I do not have the time or money. The other reason was that the river smelt so bad that we could not bear it in the summer months. The break, like many of the characteristics of this place, is long overdue for a thorough review. We should examine how we work here.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know, if he does not already, that, with the Government's policy of choice and diversity in schools, we have schools that operate five-term years. On my visit to Brooke Weston city technology college in Corby, the headmaster boasted to me, "There is only one day that this school closes—Christmas day." Is not that the proof that we are bringing choice and diversity into the education system, in contrast to the policies of the Labour party—which have been described by many organisations as naive?

Mr. Rowe: I am deeply grateful to my hon. Friend, because I had not heard of that project and a five-term school year. She would do well to make that more widely known, because it is the type of development that people would like to discuss.

A debate on equal opportunities that concentrates chiefly on securing for women what men now have is missing the point. We need to ask what sort of society we want and how we can help men and women enhance their lives and their children's lives, emotionally as well as financially. I suspect that we need to change how we teach and what we teach so that, from a much earlier age, boys and girls learn more about one another, how to value one another and how to value the differences between one another—other than in relation to the extraordinary, giggle-behind-the-hand sexual differences. The other differences make such an enormous difference, and we should be much better at learning about them.

The idea has persisted that, if a man is overwhelmed by some kind of emotional tragedy and cries, he is somehow too weak to be trusted. The same sort of nonsense is often thought about women for other reasons. That attitude is out of date. We must try to inculcate in our society a mutual respect for each other, which means that people will lose their fear that if they share equally in the burdens of life, they will somehow lose their sexual identity—they could actually enhance it.

Because I care very much about this, I have taken on the chairmanship of a temporary organisation called Heirs to the Millennium, which is sponsored by the all-party subject group for children and by the all-party subject group for Christian fellowship. It cuts clean across all cultural groups. We intend to put 1,500 people into Coventry cathedral on 22 May to drive to the top of the political agenda the question that underpins the debate about equal opportunities for women: how do we look after the next generation; how do we set the next generation the kinds of role models, standards and opportunities that will make them satisfactory heirs to the next millennium?

7.51 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) made an interesting contribution to the debate, and I agree with much of what he said, particularly in relation to negative stereotypical attitudes and the roles that young men and women have in our country. However, these behavioural attitudes are not in a vacuum: they are from the culture of our young men and

women; they are conditioned by our economic and political values—which have been set by the Government over the past 17 years. Therefore, many of the problems to which the hon. Gentleman referred are at the door of the Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) intervened on the hon. Member for Mid-Kent and asked, "What about reducing the working week?" The hon. Gentleman was not in favour of that, but he had said earlier that people were working far too many hours and did not have time for their families. There were contradictions in his speech, but I will not pursue them further.

I welcome this debate. When we have these debates, there are inevitably comments about the representation of women in the House. Since 1918, only 167 women have gained seats in the House—and if all those women were to sit in the Chamber today, they would fill only one quarter of it. That is a vivid illustration. In that context, the Labour party's efforts to increase the number of female Members of Parliament are laudable and should be praised.

I believe that scores of issues could be discussed in relation to women. I presented two Bills to the House that got the issue of pensions and divorce up and running. I hope that the Government will agree to pension splitting when the Family Law Bill returns to the House. Other issues include women in prison—there are far too many—women as carers, women in the national health service, women in poverty and the glass ceiling. Less than 3 per cent. of chief executives are women and more than 50 per cent. of company boards do not have a female director on them.

Family planning has been mentioned in passing, and it is an important issue which the Minister should address. Conservative Members like to refer to the stereotype of single mothers. The issue of too-early childbirth should be addressed—it often blights the prospects of the mother and her relationship, and more often than not limits the child's prospects as well. There should be an effective family planning programme for men and women, including education in schools. We could discuss a host of economic issues, including the prospects for women in their teens and 20s.

The Policy Studies Institute recently released a report about part-time workers and stated that equal rights at work would add 0.5 per cent. to the total wage bill—that is less than the perks that company directors pay themselves. We should put the argument for equal rights at work. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has written the following to me:

"CAB clients and Trade Union members report a levelling down rather than a levelling up of terms and conditions. Whether in full-time, part-time, or flexible work many Londoners are struggling to survive: on poverty wages; working excessively long hours; without proper breaks or holidays; and afraid to challenge their employer for fear of dismissal and the suspension of welfare benefits.

Problems at work inevitably spill over into other areas of life and CABx see at first hand the ways in which diminishing job security contributes to homelessness, debt, dependence on supplementary benefits (such as family credit) and strains upon the family and other relationships."

We should have a programme for equal rights at work and a minimum wage, as proposed by the Labour party, which would benefit millions of women.

In 1977, 1,015 rapes were reported; in 1987, that number increased to 2,471; and by 1994, the number had shot up to 5,082. However, the conviction rate for rape fell from 32 per cent. of the complaints in 1977, to 18 per cent. in 1987 and to only 10 per cent. in 1994. That is a shocking figure, and the issue must be addressed. It is said that 83 per cent. of rapes are carried out by a man known to the woman concerned, and approximately half of all rapes are carried out by husbands or by partners. When rape is by a partner, it is often a repeated experience for the woman.

The Government should address that issue. There should be a reform of the Crown Prosecution Service and it should be reactivated to deal with rape, and higher priority should be given to increasing the level of rape convictions. The Government must take that issue more seriously—the 10 per cent. figure is appalling. The Government should also take action in relation to rape within marriage, and it should be on the statute book as a crime. I hope that the Minister considers including it in the Family Law Bill when it comes before the House.

The 1982 British crime survey suggested that there was a minimum of half a million domestic violence incidents per year, 87 per cent. of which are against women. In 1991, 120 women were killed by their partners, representing 41 per cent. of all women who were murdered. Domestic violence accounts for one quarter of all reported violent assault, yet research suggests that only 2 per cent. of violent attacks on women are reported to the police. In fact, the Women's Aid Federation estimates that a woman will be assaulted 35 times before she makes a complaint to the police about domestic violence. The problem is extensive, yet the services provided to tackle it are seriously overstretched.

Women's Aid refuges have increased in number but are severely overstretched. In 1992-93, an estimated 45,000 women and children fled to the safety of a refuge house, and more than 100,000 used the services of a local refuge group. In 1975, the Home Affairs Select Committee recommended that there be at least one family refuge place per 10,000 of the population. Research by Women's Aid suggests that only a third of that number are available.

Women's Aid reported that, in Glasgow, in 1991-92, 221 women were admitted to its refuge and 1,047 turned away. That was only one area, so very many women and their children continue to be turned away. One in five refuge groups have no full-time staff and the crisis phonelines are sparse and inadequate—far fewer than in the United States, Canada and Australia.

Mrs. Gillan: As the hon. Gentleman is making such a thoughtful speech, I am sad that he is the only Back Bencher on the Labour Benches during this part of the debate. I wonder whether he is aware that rape in marriage is considered a crime in this country following the House of Lords decision in the early part of this decade. Is he aware that, in Germany, rape in marriage is not a criminal offence?

Mr. Cohen: I appreciate that point. Rape in marriage should be a criminal offence in every country, including Germany. Yes, I am aware of the decision; the Law Lords made it after I presented a ten-minute Bill. Nevertheless, there should be such a provision on the statute book. I remind the Government that they accept that it should be on the statute book, provided that there is parliamentary time. The Family Law Bill will give the opportunity for that to happen.

[Mr. Cohen]

The United Nations "Global Platform for Action" talks about the need for Governments to

"organise, support and fund community-based educational training campaigns to raise awareness about violence against women as a violation of their human rights".

Mr. Rowe: The hon. Gentleman knows far more about the subject than I do and I am diffident about asking him, but surely we need more than refuges or educational programmes to enable people to understand that there is a lot of violence. Surely we need to break into the cycle of violence, because in marriage many violent men have no way of handling the pressures that are generated between husband and wife, and revert to primitive responses. I cannot help feeling that there must be more scope than is sometimes allowed for breaking into that cycle.

Mr. Cohen: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, with which I agree. People who are violent in marriage have often witnessed violence in their parents' marriage and perpetuate it. That cycle should be broken, and to help do so the Government should formulate an education programme to be adopted in schools and throughout society.

I mentioned what the UN "Global Platform for Action" says about Governments organising, supporting and funding a campaign promoting awareness of violence against women. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture is co-chairman of the Women's National Commission. Many fine organisations have contributed to the view expressed by the Women's National Commission in its response to the UN global platform. It says, in relation to that recommendation, that the key action is for the Government to

"Organise, support and fund a range of information, education and training campaigns and programmes to raise awareness about violence against women as an unacceptable violation of human rights; and about patterns of media presentation which promote stereotypes and may generate violence."

It also speaks about the need to

"Support, promote and fund positive initiatives in education and training in non-violence, conflict resolution, assertiveness, self-help; and the stimulation of public debate on the causes, effects and elimination of violence against women."

That is a good recommendation by the WNC, and I ask the Government to implement it and put their weight behind it.

The WNC talks about organising, supporting and funding those initiatives which have been lacking from the Government until now. I hope that the Government will now put them into action.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman is generous to give way twice. Is he aware that, following the meeting in Bèjing, I initiated an implementation plan for the platform for action, and that I wished to consult all non-governmental organisations, including the WNC? I wanted to hear their interpretation of the document and what they believed Government and other organisations should do in response to it.

It has been a successful consultation; indeed, the organisations asked for the consultation period to be extended. I look forward to studying the recommendations and advice of those organisations, which did much work before the conference and are making a contribution after it. It is a continuing process.

Mr. Cohen: I appreciate the Minister's comments, but we are getting close to the time when consultation must come to an end and action must start. The Government need to act promptly in response to the WNC's recommendations.

The UN global platform talks about providing

"well-funded shelters and relief support for girls and women subjected to violence; medical, psychological and other counselling services and free or low-cost legal aid, as well as appropriate assistance to find means of subsistence".

The WNC says that that must be implemented and that the Government need to develop

"healing and counselling programmes to support girls, young women, refugees, disabled and others who are especially vulnerable to abuse in homes, institutions and workplaces"

and

"Require all courts to provide accommodation such that the victim(s) neither wait nor attend trial in full view of the aggressor, in particular in cases where children are involved."

Obviously, the Government must take action. I return to the shortage of refuge places, which the Government are not tackling. When will they tackle it? I tabled early-day motion 323 after an especially horrific killing of a woman and her children by a violent husband, I believe in Bristol.

My motion called for

"a national network of battered women's refuges",

which has been delayed too long. We need to make up the remaining two thirds of the places recommended by the Home Affairs Select Committee, and the Government must co-ordinate the effort and help to fund it. It is crucial that there is a clear, unambiguous Home Office commitment to a co-ordinated national strategy to respond to domestic violence and establish and support adequate numbers of refuges to cope.

I have a final point to make about domestic violence, which involves immigrant women. Under British immigration law, the one-year rule means that, for someone to be entitled to come and stay in this country on the basis of marriage, that person has to have been married for one year. If, within that year, the person is subjected to violence and leaves the relationship, he or she is effectively punished by being deported from the country, which is unfair. There is a strong case for the Government to abolish that one-year rule, so that women who are subjected to violence by their partner are not thrown out of the country.

It is interesting that, when the Minister intervened in my speech for the second time, she mentioned consulting, as my final comments involve a briefing from the Fawcett Society, which states:

"A year and a half after Vienna"—

which was when the Government signed up to the United Nations platform for action—

"the Government is still 'consulting'. The Cabinet has offered no focus or vision . . . The token Ministerial Committees on Women's Issues, and on Domestic Violence are invisible, inaudible and unaccountable. Public consultation has been too little and too late and using the too narrow channel of the Women's National Commission. This is in sharp contrast to the actions of advanced modern nations such as Canada and Australia who have advertised the Platform on public TV."

They are not my comments but those of the Fawcett Society, which has a place on the Women's National Commission.

There are important issues involving equal opportunities for women on which the Government need to take urgent action—none more so than the violence that too many women in this country face in their everyday lives. The Government should take on board those comments and act.

8.11 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): Despite the fact that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said that we have many subjects to discuss this evening, I believe that there is a danger of the debate becoming repetitive. I hope to be brief, but I shall start by repeating the comments of two of my hon. Friends—my hon. Friends the Members for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) and for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—who said that the debate was patronising. I agree, and I hope that in future we shall not have such a debate.

Much to my surprise, I agreed with the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), who, unfortunately, is no longer present and did not have the courtesy to stay to hear the concluding comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). If we are to have such a debate—I am not entirely certain that we need one—it should be on a balanced equal opportunities policy.

I have had 20 to 30 years of active involvement in the women's movement, beginning with Mary Stott's women's page in *The Guardian*. I was also involved in lobbying for the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and in persuading Inland Revenue officials of the need to have independent taxation for married women. I also played a small part in persuading the present Lord Lawson of Blaby at the party conference of the need for that policy.

Our legislative platform covers the requirements of equality for women. Both before that legislative platform and subsequently, we introduced the support systems that allow women to achieve their ambitions. The long list mentioned in my hon. Friend the Minister's excellent speech showed the variety of support systems that are put in place, not just by the state but by the voluntary and business sectors.

Based on my years of experience in the women's movement, I believe that we now need seriously to consider an infinitely more threatening aspect of the subject which has strong parallels with the problems that women used to face in the late 1960s and early 1970s. That threatening aspect involves the lack of opportunity, lack of vision, demotivation and lack of confidence among the dispossessed young white male population, particularly in schools.

In the late 1960s, we women were able to tackle our problems and create our own solutions; it was a long, hard fight and the House contains many veterans of the battle. There are many veterans outside the House—as many hon. Members have said, they range from the Women's Institute in the 1930s to the Fawcett Society. Many such organisations have come and gone because their job has been completed.

Now, we must ensure that young boys in school tackle the problems and start creating solutions. If they do not do that, we, as a society, will be left with the insoluble problem that was so graphically described by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent. Like him, I have no prescriptions on how we can solve the problem. I was pleased that the chief inspector of schools publicly identified the problems that some of us have been noticing for some time. If we are to have such a debate next year, I would prefer it to be on that subject. We must focus firmly on the problems of those young men.

I suspect that those young men are still brought up in an atmosphere in which they believe that the only real jobs are physical, heavy jobs. Training is often needed for such jobs in the steel and shipbuilding industries and in coal mining. It was often taken for granted that, when boys left school, they would go into such jobs. Now, if they are lucky, they might get a job labouring for a few months, but they are then chucked back on to the unemployment scrap heap precisely because they have no vision of where they want to go and no idea of how to get there.

Schools can help to a certain extent. We are also finding that parents opt out; they often have no vision of what the boys can do. Outside agencies—all the organs of the state—which the boys do not regard as enemies, must intervene. Those who cannot help include social workers, teachers, the police and those involved in social security and any other social services. They are often regarded as the enemy—an authority to be decried, avoided and probably mocked. We must tackle that problem and help those boys to develop the support structures they need, so that society does not have to deal with generations of dispossessed young, rogue males.

I hope that I have reinforced the message of some of my hon. Friends that it would be a pleasure if next year we did not have to debate equal opportunities for women. I look forward to hearing the speech of the Parliamentary Secretary.

8.17 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): I tiptoe gingerly into this debate, but I am fortified by following my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), who made a wise and sensible speech—as have nearly all the charming lady Members who have spoken. I was inspired to participate by the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) and, to some extent, by the speech by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), whom I always seem to follow in these debates. I want to talk about violence, particularly the serious problem of juvenile crime. No debate on equal opportunities can take place without some consideration of the children.

One of my constituents is the wife of a don and was a founder member of an organisation called WATCH—What About The Children? It has done a great deal of work and put a lot of thought into the subject. Although my constituent, Mrs. Switzer, is no longer on the executive committee of WATCH, she keeps me in touch with the remarkable amount of research that is being conducted in that sphere.

There is no doubt about it: we must all be desperately concerned about the sad and inexorable rise in juvenile crime—some of it among the very young. It was highlighted particularly by that ghastly Bulger case a couple of years ago. There is overwhelming evidence that the seedbed of juvenile crime is broken homes and an unhappy family relationship, often involving violence, as the hon. Member for Leyton said.

[Sir Anthony Grant]

It is clear that the origins of crime are in early childhood experience. We have to apply our minds to that because the prevention of juvenile crime, disorder and misbehaviour is far more important—and cheaper—than its cure. Instead of spending vast sums on prisons, reforms schools, social workers, probation and goodness knows what, it is better to tackle the problem at the root. All the research that I have been given shows that the problem starts much earlier than one would think—in childhood.

I draw the attention of the House to the remarkable work by various learned professors, including David Smith and Michael Rutter. Let me quote a few items from the work of Dr. Elliott Barker, the president of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. He writes:

"The community—that is, all of us—suffers the ill effects of absentee parenting . . . The closer the mother's supervision of the child, the more intimate the child's communication with the father, and the greater the affection between child and parents, the less the delinquency."

I am wholly and absolutely in favour of equal opportunities. Women often do a much better job than men, except in rugby, but in virtually everything else they do an extremely good job. I am therefore entirely in favour of equal opportunity, but women are unique in that they provide the basis, the home and right upbringing for tiny children.

Mr. Merchant: I hesitate to intrude on my hon. Friend, but he mentioned rugby and I would like to draw his attention to the fact that, in 1995, Beverly Davis established that she could stand for election to the national executive committee of the Rugby Football Union. That is proudly reported in the document from the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Sir Anthony Grant: In that case, I bow entirely to my hon. Friend, although I hope that I do not live to see the day when the English ladies' 15 beats the English or Scottish men's 15.

Dr. Elliott Barker continued:

"We made an extraordinary sobering discovery. An unattached child, even at the age of three and four, cannot easily attach himself, even when he is provided with the most favourable conditions for the formation of a human bonds. The most expert clinical workers and foster parents can testify that to win such a child, to make him care, to become important to him, to be needed by him, and finally to be loved by him is the work of months and years. Yet all of this, including the achievement of a binding love for a partner, normally takes place at home, without psychiatric consultation, in ordinary homes, with ordinary babies during the first year of life."

Those are the views of an eminent psychiatrist who has devoted his life to studying that problem.

My other quotation is from my constituency of Cambridge, and comes from a most distinguished person—Professor David Farrington, who is professor of psychological criminology at Cambridge and whose work is funded by the Home Office. He concludes his paper, "The Influence of the Family on Delinquent Development, 1994"

as follows:

"It would be in everyone's interests for some far-sighted politician or civil servant to lay the foundations now in the hope of achieving a decrease in this wide range of associated pathological problems in the next century. Unfortunately, on recent experience, it may need another 100 cases at least as horrific as James Bulger before anything will be done."

Something can be done. The new ministerial body on juvenile crime, which met in January, is carrying out some useful work. I hope that it will take on board the findings of recent research that problems of crime, disorder and unhappiness start far earlier than anyone had imagined. It is no good getting children into school and assuming that teachers can do the job. They cannot. It has to happen at home, primarily with the mother. She may be able to manage a job and do other work, but caring for children should come first.

I have never quite understood why, in recent years, caring for children has become rather infra dig and people look down their noses at some poor person who looks after children and say, "She is just a childminder, a nanny or a woman at home." They feel that it is much grander and more superior to work in an office or a factory.

We need a change of culture. We should point out that caring for children is a most exacting, professional and expert job. Therefore, as my constituent suggested, we should teach parenthood in schools. It is just as important as fiddling around with computers. It is absolutely crucial. With those few thoughts, I shall sit down. I am sure that my hon. Friends the charming Ministers on the Front Bench will take them all on board and convey them to the rest of the Government.

8.25 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I am always genuinely surprised when I encounter prejudice against women, as I find it hard to understand. Having considered the matter in more detail, I have reached the conclusion that the issue of equality of opportunity for women depends to a large extent on the attitude of individuals. Although there should be a correct legal framework, the problems will be solved only when some people change their attitudes. That can be achieved in two ways—first, by reasonable and practical argument rather than ideology as that will convince people far more easily, and secondly, by example.

Many hon. Members have rightly referred to the gender imbalance in House. I would be delighted to see that righted. In my view, the Chamber would change for the better as a result. However, I part company from the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell), who implied that about 50 per cent. of hon. Members should be women in order properly to represent women in the country. That is a slur on hon. Members who are in the Chamber today.

I do not believe that, because I am a man, I am any less able to represent my female constituents, any more than hon. Ladies are at a disadvantage in representing male constituents. Although the House would be more reflective of society in general if there were a better balance between the sexes, the hon. Lady's arguments were not valid in respect of the task of each Member in representing his or her constituents.

I also disagreed with the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) who retreated into psycho-babble about feminine issues. She almost invalidated her argument when she said that there were no such things as female issues, but that there was a female perspective. She went on to say that it did not necessarily require a woman to understand the female perspective, and at that point I felt that she had lost sight of her argument.

The discussion of quotas can be dangerous, and no one has suggested that there should be a quota of women in the Chamber. That would be very weak argument. That argument is advanced as a cure for the problem in other parts of society. However, I believe that it would be demeaning to women and would not solve the underlying problems: we must achieve a natural balance in such things.

Why is not the percentage of women in the population reflected in the number of female Members of Parliament? It is not because of any legal restrictions—they have not existed for years—or because of a reluctance on the part of voters to elect women. Except in a few isolated cases, all the psephological evidence is that the electorate does not discriminate between the sexes. The problem clearly lies with selection committees, and it affects all parties. It is not particularly significant that the Labour party is now selecting more female candidates, as that is only a recent decision.

It is true that some selection committees are prejudiced. The Labour party must be introducing a quota system in order to overcome a perceived prejudice—I cannot think of any other logical reason for that practice. However, the central problem—I speak from experience in the Conservative party—is a lack of potential female candidates. That has nothing to do with the present popularity of the Conservative party: the trend has been apparent for many years. We must address that essential problem—how do we encourage more women to come forward and play a role in politics?

The same problem exists in other walks of life. One solution to that problem is to lead by example. Female trendsetters must step forward and show what can be done. They must prove that the perceived barriers can be broken down or that, in some cases, they do not exist at all. We need role models whom other women can follow.

I am not prejudiced against women participating in politics or fulfilling any other role, perhaps because I grew up during a time when women were moving into all areas of society. I studied law at university, when significant numbers of women were entering higher education. At that time, about one third of law students were women—shortly after, the figure increased to 50 per cent. and more. As a young student, I witnessed some of the prejudice that existed among older male staff members. I measured that prejudice against my experience of seeing women students performing as well as their male colleagues—there was no significant difference in ability—which proved to be a shining example of how baseless that prejudice was.

Later, I became a journalist, at a time when women were beginning to enter that profession. There were few women on my training course, but two or three years later 50 per cent. of new trainees were female. I again saw prejudice among older established journalists and staff members which was clearly baseless. Perhaps if I had not seen young female journalists performing to a very high standard, I might have shared that prejudice, but clearly it had no basis in reality.

We had a female Prime Minister when I first entered the House in 1983. She was clearly able to perform that arduous task far better than most of the potential male candidates for the role. When I returned to the House in 1992, Madam Speaker demonstrated that the Speaker's job could be performed effectively by a woman. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will not mind my saying that I would not mind—perhaps I would not even notice—if you were a woman, as I am now used to the idea of men and women occupying the Chair. However, there was a time when many people would have been aghast at that prospect and would have said that a woman could not possibly do the job. That is a vital reason why it is important to set an example: we can break down prejudice by showing what can be done.

A few weeks ago, I visited the Royal Air Force personnel and training command. I am trying to learn a little about the services, as I am not particularly knowledgeable in that area. I was delighted to hear that there are two fast jet women pilots. It was interesting to hear the RAF top brass—whom one might expect to adopt a very traditional or prejudiced attitude towards women—full of pride and praise for the women who are increasingly playing an important role in all areas of the armed services. They are setting an example that I am sure many women will follow in future.

A second solution to the problem of prejudice is reasonable and practical argument. One can advance two principal arguments in that regard. The first is a modern argument concerning meritocracy. We can have a proper, functioning meritocracy only if everyone in society has an equal opportunity to strive for excellence. I support the idea of a meritocracy and that sort of society requires equality of opportunity if it is to function properly.

The second, more traditional argument that can blend with the first is the old-fashioned view—which I hope is still widely held—that common courtesy requires people to be thoughtful and polite to others, whoever they are and whatever their gender and personal characteristics. That should not be a superficial courtesy: we should respect the intrinsic value of human beings and treat all people equally. Blended together, I think that those two approaches are powerful arguments against all forms of prejudice.

One can also view the issue in a moral and pragmatic way. The individual develops best if he or she is allowed to fulfil his or her potential; therefore, society should encourage people to do that. There should be no artificial barriers to prevent it. In conjunction with that is the pragmatic argument that the whole of society benefits if all available talent is harnessed and given a full and a free rein. All people—whatever their origins or gender—should have the opportunity to develop their full potential, because they, and the whole of society, will benefit as a result.

I have concentrated on the argument for setting an example and the reasons why we must convince people that attitudes that foster prejudice are dangerous and undermine a successful society. However, I must refer also to the Government's important role in leading by example and by establishing and maintaining a framework in which we can all operate effectively. I emphasise the importance of organisations such as the Equal Opportunities Commission, which I believe does some very good work. I do not agree with everything it says or does, but I believe that it fulfils an important function as a body that exists to encourage equality of opportunity. Equally important are statutory mechanisms such as the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, which enjoyed all-party support.

Quotas and negative discrimination ultimately undermine equality, because they demean women, are patronising and give people who resist equality the opportunity to argue, "Those women have advanced only because they were given a step up." Quotas are also a

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

form of discrimination, so they contradict the purpose of equality of opportunity, which should be based on eliminating discrimination.

The danger that emerges when the topic is addressed, particularly if too enthusiastically by some, is the pressure that some women feel to perform in the professions and other careers while meeting the demands of rearing children. If women choose and want to be full-time mothers or homemakers, as many do, they should not be pressured to give up those roles. In giving women opportunities, we ought to be giving them choice—rather than direct them in one particular direction. I have known women who were under intolerable pressure because it happened to be trendy to establish themselves in a full-time, lasting career when they were not happy in that sort of life. If women do choose it, that is fine—I am all in favour of that choice being available and encouraged.

The emphasis in equality should be on the word "opportunity", which implies choice. Equality should not be about replacing an old-fashioned stereotype with a brave new stereotype. That would be almost as dangerous, if not more dangerous.

8.42 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): This is the first time that I have spoken from the Dispatch Box, and it is a handy place to put one's notes. I am conscious that I am addressing a Chamber in which few women have stood to speak, in a Parliament in which women are woefully under-represented. That means that my presence in this Chamber, and that of other women Members of Parliament in all parts of the House, is a special privilege—but it also reflects the challenge facing us and the difficulties still to be overcome in increasing the representation of women in Parliament. I shall return to that subject.

I am particularly pleased that my first opportunity to speak from the Dispatch Box is in a debate on equal opportunities during International Women's Week, which gives the House and other Parliaments throughout the world a formal opportunity to examine women's progress towards equality, celebrate women's achievements and set the agenda for our objectives. When the point is reached when every piece of legislation pays particular attention to the structural problems that confront women, quicker progress will be made with achieving equality.

We believe that a Cabinet Minister for women is crucial to that achievement. Responsibility for women's issues should not be tagged on to a long list of duties for an Under-Secretary of State—which reinforces the view that equality is a marginal issue instead of fundamentally central to our social structure.

International Women's Day stems from a demonstration on 8 March 1857 by women in the United States of America against their low wages and appalling working conditions. European women first celebrated International Women's Day in 1911, as an opportunity to demand the right to vote and hold public office. We have achieved those aims, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) said, poor wages, poor working conditions and poverty are still part of women's lives in 1996.

In contrast to the views of Conservative Members, who feel that this debate is a wasted opportunity, I welcome it. I hope that such debates will continue, because we discovered that every past debate produced an announcement of new initiatives by the Minister. If there is no debate, there will be no more announcements.

The Minister mentioned two positive approach programmes—Opportunity 2000 and Fair Play for Women. We have persuaded the Government to accept the word "positive" in relation to women. They also use the word "action" in relation to programmes—but we cannot get the Government to use the two words together. Opportunity 2000's positive approach to an action programme goes too far for the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, because in Defence questions, the hon. Gentleman referred to it as "politically correct nonsense". That shows the difficulties that the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment faces in dealing with her colleagues. I do not envy her task of raising the consciousness of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

I welcomed Opportunity 2000 and helped in my constituency when it was launched in 1991. In organisations that are Opportunity 2000 members, 8 per cent. of directors and senior managers are women, compared with 3 per cent. in non-member companies, which demonstrates the value of the positive action that is much decried by the Government when faced with European Union legislation. In last year's debate, the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster welcomed the fact that 71 per cent. of Opportunity 2000 employers offered maternity arrangements above the statutory minimum and 67 per cent. offered maternity leave. He seemed to feel that that was a good thing. It is curious that the Government will not give statutory paternity rights. Opportunity 2000 members do not view such a social contract as detrimental to their businesses or employees.

I welcome also the Fair Play for Women initiative, launched in 1994. Is the Minister aware that it is difficult to obtain a copy of the "Fair Play for Women Newsletter"? I telephoned several businesses and organisations in my constituency, but they were unable to supply one—a pity, as it is rather good. I looked for a reference to funding and found these words:

> "The process of working bottom up and developing activities through consultation has ensured that funds have been identified and secured en route."

I believe that that means that there is no funding—a shame, because such a project deserves underpinning in the form of stable resources. Perhaps we have discovered the difference between a positive approach and positive action—the former requires no money.

Women's representation at leadership level is crucial. It is a way of breaking institutionalised attitudes and structural problems that are barriers to achievement. If poor representation continues at that level, attitudes that contribute to the situation will continue. If it is believed that women lack leadership skills, are not tough enough and are not serious about careers, and their management style is not as acceptable as that of men, they will not be appointed. But if women are not appointed, the attitude that they are unsuitable will continue to be reinforced. The organisational difficulties and inflexible working arrangements will continue to discourage women, to the detriment not only of women, but of men and the organisations themselves.

The only way to create change is to challenge attitudes strongly and find mechanisms to appoint more women. Before Conservative Members start getting hot under their

collars, I do not mean appointing women for the sake of it: I mean appointing women on merit. The problem is that prevailing attitudes mean that the merit of women is not as easily seen as the merit of men.

The then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in his speech last year, referred to the programme of action for women in the civil service. Notice the absence of the word "positive". In attempts to increase the proportion of women at a senior level, part-time working and the possibility of part-time working have obviously had an important effect, but changing attitudes have also been important. It is not possible that, 10 years ago, women had sufficient merit to fill only 29 per cent. of senior positions, but now have sufficient merit to fill 40 per cent., 10 years later. Attitudes to women have clearly changed, their merits are more easily seen and recognised, and women have become more visible.

Lack of recognition of women's merits is built very deeply into our structures and attitudes to women's contributions at home and at work. Women are the primary carers. We take responsibility for bringing up children as well as for caring for dependent relatives. Some 48 per cent. of women with children under four are at home. They are unfortunately referred to in a Department for Education and Employment report as "economically inactive". That is a curious description, because I remember my years as a parent as one of the most physically arduous times of my life.

In their role as parents, women's—and, indeed, men's—contributions to the health of future generations, and to the general level of welfare and community care, are unquantifiable. Nothing is as fundamentally important as loving care for children, but support for the family is important for women. Women are very committed to their families, often to their cost. One of the saddest aspects of domestic violence is that women often stay in totally unacceptable situations, in which they are beaten and abused, for the sake of their children. Women's commitment to their family is tremendous.

Some 35 per cent. of women gave as their reason for working part time—in a report issued by the Department for Education and Employment—the fact that they wanted to spend more time with their family, and 3.5 per cent. cited domestic commitments such as household tasks. Women still take major responsibility for making the evening meal and doing the household cleaning, washing and ironing. We should remember that part-time work outside the home is on top of a full-time job inside the home.

An increasing proportion of women are working outside the home in part-time occupations, and 89 per cent. of those women work in services, 50 per cent. in three main groups—clerical and secretarial; sales; and personal services, including catering, nursing and hairdressing. Ethnic minority women are heavily concentrated in cleaning, hotel and catering work. Jobs that women do are undervalued and poorly paid, because they are women's jobs and seen as women's jobs. That reflects the attitude towards women in our society. It contributes to a depressing cycle of disadvantage and discrimination. Those attitudes do not help anybody and they do not help women, their families or men.

Intolerable stress, financial and physical, on families leads to breakdown. Families need support to remain healthy and to survive, and I include in that many different kinds of family organisations. Poor working conditions and wages outside the home are a major cause of stress for both men and women, but especially for women in poorly paid work.

Affordable child care is an important support for families, and quality child care is crucial. For the women who need child care, other women provide it. For the women who need child care, it needs to be affordable. For the women who provide it, they are also entitled to decent levels of income, to allow them to take advantage of training courses, to improve the quality of child care. Unless we have a proper child care strategy, the women who look after children will be as disadvantaged as the women who need child minders.

Time after time, the real difficulties that women face are overlooked in legislation. That brings me back to the subject of Parliament. We in Parliament cannot make credible statements about the importance that we attach to progress towards equality for women while the representation of women here is so low. Parliament is supposed to be representative of people in their political affiliations, but also in their occupations and experiences. Sadly, this Parliament is not. A Parliament that is under-representative is a diminished Parliament, which ultimately will be out of touch.

Currently, there are 63 women Members of Parliament and 38 of them are Labour. We expect, after the next election, that our representation will almost treble. We have done our bit. Whatever comments the Government care to make about that process, as the other major political party, they have not done their bit. At the moment, the Conservatives have 17 women Members of Parliament, but it would seem that only a few women candidates have been chosen in safe seats. I do not understand their problem. It must be difficult to find a safe seat, but as they claim to select on merit, the only conclusion that women out there can draw is that Conservative women have no merit. If they were selected on merit, surely there would be more women Conservative Members of Parliament. If the Conservatives spent less time criticising us and more time on action to increase their female membership of the House, we might see some progress towards proper representation.

The Conservatives should be in no doubt about the message that women will take from the Conservative party, now and after the next election. There will be wall-to-wall men on the Opposition Benches—that is where the Conservatives will have to sit—and on the Government Benches, where we shall be sitting, there will be 80 or 90 Labour women Members of Parliament. That will change the face of Parliament dramatically, and it will be because we have done it. We shall keep our word in government, with a Minister for women who will, through the legislative process of this House and positive action, start to deal with the structural changes that need to be effected to make the lives of women better, today and in the future.

8.57 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): It is a great pleasure to welcome the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) to the Dispatch Box and to congratulate her on her first performance there. I could not agree with all she said, but she presented it articulately. As a gesture of good will, I can, however, offer to put her on the mailing list for the "Fair Play"

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

newsletter, which is compiled and funded by the Government. We shall be delighted to put all the hon. Lady's friends on the list as well.

I am pleased to be able to take part in another debate to mark International Women's Day. The debate has been wide-ranging, with numerous speakers testifying to the importance of the subject. It was extremely encouraging to note the gravitas that the Labour party attaches to the debate, in the form of the deputy leader of the Labour party, who attended the opening speeches. One thing that women are good at is reading body language. I watched the right hon. Gentleman carefully, and although he said nothing, except from a sedentary position, his body language said it all.

As Government co-chairman of the Women's National Commission, I have been impressed by the diversity of the women who make up the commission, by the high quality of their work and by the strength of their commitment to our goal of improving the status of women in this country. When the WNC makes recommendations to the Government, it does so with the support of all its member organisations, which, although they all represent women, are fairly diverse.

People are often surprised that women from such a wide variety of backgrounds can reach agreement on what often appear to be controversial issues, but when there are problems and disputes, it is quite common to find that a group of women sitting down to try to sort them out can resolve them much more quickly. I see hon. Members nodding in agreement with that.

In last Sunday's newspapers, journalists devoted several column inches to speculating about what would happen if women ran the country. I have had some minor experience of that. When I was younger, I used to take part in amateur dramatics, and we put on a play called "No Time for Fig Leaves". I do not suppose that it is a play in which the hon. Member for Stockport has ever been invited to take part. Our group found it quite amusing; the whole country was run by women, but it all ended in tears, so perhaps it was not a good example to follow.

As Government co-chairman of the WNC, my task is to convey the commission's views to Government, which I do. I shall continue to urge my colleagues in Government to give the commission the attention that it deserves: it is a worthwhile body.

On this international occasion, I must mention the UN's fourth world conference on women, where I was one of the three Ministers heading the UK delegation. I feel that the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) did a grave disservice earlier today to my right hon. Friend Baroness Chalker. Her reputation around the world has not, to my knowledge, been questioned before. She works very hard, and she is not a person to make commitments that she does not intend to honour. It was rather disgraceful of the hon. Lady to cast such aspersions, when it is clear that the platform for action is being implemented.

The hon. Member for Dulwich should know from her association with the Women's National Commission of the plan that was set out even before the Peking conference. When we returned to the United Kingdom, we already had in place a way of collating feedback about the conference from voluntary organisations, the Equal Opportunities Commission and others, so that my right hon. Friend was provided with a structure plan on which to base proposals as to how the Government would implement the platform for action.

We have kept to the schedule. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment is consulting the relevant bodies to discuss with them how to put it into practice. Baroness Chalker's commitment has therefore been honoured, and will continue to be honoured.

Ms Jowell: What I said was that Baroness Chalker's commitment would be judged by her actions, not by what she said in Beijing. Since the delegation returned, the Government have taken a number of decisions and have introduced a number of policies that are highly damaging to women. They are at complete variance with the commitments to which they signed up in Peking.

Mrs. Browning: I rebut that assertion. The hon. Lady clearly expressed the view that my right hon. Friend says one thing when abroad and does quite another at home. She misrepresents my right hon. Friend. Time will tell. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment will be implementing the platform for action, and will work closely with women's organisations to see how it can be put into practice.

Ms Jowell: We shall see.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Lady speaks as though nothing is happening. I do not know whether she has read the final document from Peking, but she will almost certainly know the timetable for action, and the fact that consultation is taking place. I hope that the hon. Lady will be reassured that my right hon. and noble Friend is honouring that commitment to the letter.

The Beijing conference has been mentioned by various hon. Members. I was inspired by the energy, determination and tenacity of the UK women's non-governmental organisations, who worked hard not only in Beijing but in Huairou, where many of them put in a great deal of preparation to very good effect.

Hon. Members have questioned why the conference was held in China. It was a UN conference, and it was the turn of the Asian countries to determine the venue. They decided unanimously that it should be held in China. It would have been quite wrong for the United Kingdom not to be represented.

In fact, when we got there, it was very evident that the conference was an excellent opportunity to air in public issues that I suspect have not been aired in public in Beijing ever before—specifically, the girl child issue. The Chinese were certainly not able to suppress the views of 36,000 women. I hope that, in a small way, holding the conference at that venue contributed towards voicing the concerns of many of us about human rights and the girl child in China.

I have expressed before, and I am happy to put on record in the House, my absolute disgust with the way in which the conference was reported in the UK, other European countries and America. Those of us who attended the conference will know that the media, particularly the television companies, focused on what I can describe only as fringe activities, and totally missed the whole point of the constructive work done in Beijing and Huairou. I welcome the opportunity to pay tribute to the conference, where the NGOs did some extremely good work.

The Women's National Commission played a major role in providing support and information to NGOs in Beijing. It has planned a major conference called "Beyond Beijing", which will take place in the summer, and it has set up a working group on the theme "Growing up Female in the UK", which takes forward one of the key themes of the "Global Platform for Action" agreed in Beijing.

The world conference has reinforced the spirit of partnership between the Government and other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors with an interest in women and equal opportunities. Partnership is a vital tool in the advancement of women and equality between the sexes. For example, in developing the highly successful out-of-school child care initiative, the Government have worked closely with the Kids Club Network and other child care organisations. I know from work that is being done in my constituency and in Devon how much that is valued.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said, the Government are providing £60 million. I was very disappointed by how dismissive the hon. Member for Dulwich was of that funding. Naturally, we would be very interested to know what higher bid the Labour party is proposing, but, as usual, wherever it is asked to cost something that it has criticised, answer comes there none. Indeed, the Labour party tries to avoid putting figures to commitments or criticisms of funding whenever it can.

Ms Corston: Absolutely.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Lady says, "Absolutely." I do not think that she should worry that we do not understand. We understand only too well why, in this debate for example, as in others, the Labour party will not put a price on the minimum wage. We know why. Figures have been bandied about by the Labour party and the Trades Union Congress.

The Liberal Democrats should also be concerned, because they intend to rob us of jobs with that awful policy as well. The moment that the Labour party names a figure—whether it is £4.50, £5 or £5.10 an hour—every employer in the country, regardless of whether it is a large company, but especially if it is a small company, will be able to do their sums accurately and say, "What does that mean for the people I employ and the potential to employ people in future?"

The reason why the Labour party has backed off from even saying what the minimum wage would be in today's marketplace is that, the moment it does, its cover is blown. Every company throughout the country would be able to say specifically what that would mean in terms of job losses. We all know that many women would be involved in those job losses, the very people whom Labour Members are purporting to represent.

Ms Corston: The Minister will probably know that, some years ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), when on the Opposition Front Bench, asked the then Chancellor of the Exchequer about the tax rates that the Government proposed to introduce in the Budget, which was weeks away.

My right hon. Friend was told by the then Chancellor that that was a stupid question. He said, in effect, "How can I possibly know what tax rates will be proposed in a few weeks time?" If that holds true, why do Ministers make themselves so ridiculous by prating on about what we, the Opposition, would do? We are here to oppose the Government and to challenge their policies. Fancy asking what an Opposition will be doing when in government 14 months hence.

Mrs. Browning: Fancy asking the Opposition what they would do. It was only a short while ago that figures were bandied about. I can remember clearly the TUC coming up with a figure—I think that it was £5.10. The moment that the TUC started to pop its head up above the parapet—

Ms Eagle: No.

Mrs. Browning: If I am wrong, the hon. Lady must know the right figure. I shall gladly give way to her if she says that I have quoted the wrong figure. She must know the right figure. I shall give way if she will give me the right figure.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Let me do that on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). We do not give the Government any figures, because they have fiddled every figure we have produced. In the lead-up to the general election, the Government fiddled all the figures. That was done by the Department that I was shadowing before the election. Figures were distorted beyond all recognition. The figure that the Minister has attributed to the TUC is incorrect. It was £4.15, not £5.10.

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for at least exposing a figure. Whatever the figure is, Joe Bloggs in my constituency, perhaps employing 10 or 12 people—

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Browning: No. I will not give way, because I am responding to an intervention.

As I was saying, Joe Bloggs in my constituency may be employing 10 or 12 people. If we were to say what the minimum wage would be—we are not that far away from a general election—he would be able to tell me, if he had to apply that wage to his staff payroll, how many people he would have to sack and how many people he would not employ the following year whom he had planned to employ. He might, of course, say, "That is all right. We can afford to pay that."

Labour Members and the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), a Liberal Democrat Member—I am a west country Member, representing part of an area where wages are lower than average within the United Kingdom—must understand that a minimum wage would be the kiss of death. I have heard everything that Opposition Members have said about women's wages. We want, of course, to see that people are paid a fair wage, but it is not the Government's role to introduce a minimum wage. Such a requirement would kill jobs, and the potential for more jobs, at a time when unemployment is consistently declining and is comparing favourably with unemployment levels elsewhere.

At present, seven European countries have a minimum wage requirement. Two examples are France and Spain. They have shown us what a minimum wage does for jobs.

[Mrs. Browning]

There are job losses for both women and men. If we are not to talk about figures in the United Kingdom, let us bear in mind what has happened in the countries where there is a minimum wage. That will enable us to recognise the reality of the policy. We see soaring unemployment, especially in low-wage sectors. That has an effect on young people, who do not command high salaries. They are at the bottom level. Youth unemployment, especially in Spain and France, which have the disgraceful policy of a minimum wage, is soaring.

Mrs. Lait: The minimum wage in France is £200 a week. Is my hon. Friend aware that the French Government are now insisting that British travel firms that employ British chalet girls and tour guides and pay on average £120 a week should pay the French statutory minimum wage? Does she agree that chalet girls and tour guides will lose their jobs, and that British travel companies will go bust?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend has summed the matter up.

Labour talked about larger companies that voluntarily enter into employment packages and agreements with their employees on matters such as paternity rights. The hon. Member for Stockport seemed to be confused about why we should think that that was all right, but not want to introduce it on a statutory basis. It is simple: if companies feel that they can voluntarily put together an employment package covering matters such as paternity rights without jeopardising jobs, of course we support it.

To introduce such a policy on a statutory basis, so that it would hit companies of all sizes in all regions, would not only kill jobs, but would especially penalise women's jobs. It would cause artificial discrimination, which would especially affect women of child-bearing age.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Lady's argument would render wrong the Equal Pay Act 1970. The arguments used against the Act while it was being put on the statute book by Barbara Castle were precisely those that the Minister uses against the minimum wage: that, if women had the right to equal pay, it would destroy their jobs, because their wages would have to rise. Exactly the opposite has happened. More women are in the labour force than ever before. Is there not an inconsistency?

Mrs. Browning: No. There are more jobs, but the hon. Lady is wrong to make that comparison. If men apply for the same jobs as women, we want equal pay, but we do not want jobs to be destroyed by a statutory minimum wage that would hit companies of all sizes. One of our great strengths, and the reason why we have declining unemployment, is that we do not have those non-wage labour costs. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) gave the example of chalet maids in France.

Other European countries that are in competition with Britain would like us to embrace such a package, because they realise that, having signed up to it, they are uncompetitive with us. They are trying to persuade us to make our companies uncompetitive. The Labour and Liberal parties think that it is a jolly good idea. I do not, and nor do the Government. That is my last word on the minimum wage.

Both at home and abroad, much has been achieved, but nobody is resting on their laurels. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment will talk not only to non-governmental organisations but to Government Departments and Ministers in every Department, to make sure that equality for women is part of the psyche of every Government Minister and Department.

In the "Global Platform for Action", that is called mainstreaming, and its implementation is regarded as desirable. We agree, and we feel that it is far better to mainstream through Government Departments, raise awareness and put it into action, than to have women regarded as a tiny body of people for whom special concessions have to be made, who stand out in the House as a poor Cinderella group.

Much has been said about women in the House; we want more of them in the House. The Labour party has argued that it has got it right by breaking its own rules to get more women on their list. The hon. Member for Christchurch said that proportional representation would help get women in. There are many reasons why women do not come into the House; there is no one simple solution. Many of the views put forward by hon. Members on both sides of the House are relevant.

We have had a good debate, and I would like to mention some speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), as she usually does in these debates, made a substantial contribution, which represented business women in particular. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) raised, in her inimitable way, several issues. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is she?"] I am not sure where she is. She said that nothing would change until men had babies.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): It will be a long wait.

Mrs. Browning: Yes, I suspect that we will have a very long wait for that. We cannot afford to wait that long, although that would be one of the most equal opportunities that men could have in life. I am sorry that we cannot bring it forward more quickly.

In a somewhat wider area of discussion, some hon. Members not only took the debate along the road of women's equality, but discussed the social effects of women's responsibilities, especially in the home and in child raising. There were thoughtful contributions by my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) and for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant), and, in perhaps the one of the most telling equal opportunity contributions of the evening, by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), who flagged up something that is at the heart of our discussion.

My hon. Friend spoke about women who, for whatever reason, are the subject of prejudice. If, as human beings or, perhaps more particularly, as parents responsible for bringing up children, we can instil into children a sense of respect for other people, regardless of gender, race or anything else that may be the subject of prejudice in daily life—my hon. Friend explained that well, as part of his own philosophy and approach to life—the attitude that he spoke about will be advanced, and we shall not have some of the problems that we have had to discuss tonight, involving prejudice against women not only in Parliament but elsewhere.

This has been a vigorous debate, and I am delighted that we have been able to hold it on the eve of what will be an important day tomorrow.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Paul Grecian

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Hanley.*]

9.21 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): In October 1990, Paul Grecian and colleagues from his firm Ordtec were arrested on the charge of illegally exporting arms to Iraq. He was immediately granted bail and proceeded to fight his case. In February 1992, the trial was heard at Reading Crown court, and during the proceedings it transpired that several vital Government documents that would have proved Government knowledge of the on-going trade with Iraq were withheld.

The prosecution viewed the documents, and falsely assured the judge that they were irrelevant. Public interest immunity certificates were signed and available for use if the judge refused to accept the assurances of lack of relevance. The evidence was suppressed, and Grecian and his colleagues had no option but to plead guilty. They were given suspended sentences.

During the court proceedings, it was revealed that Grecian, voluntarily and without reward, had been supplying vital information to MI5 and MI6 for several years—evidence that clearly illustrated the Government's knowledge of trade with Iraq, as they were aware of nearly every shipment made to the middle east. In fact, knowledge of the supergun was first passed to the Government by Grecian as early as 1989.

In February 1992, after the trial, Grecian began proceedings for an appeal. The high-profile Matrix Churchill case, almost identical to the Ordtec case, highlighted the unique position that Grecian had been forced to accept, because important and revealing documents were withheld by the Government.

On 16 June 1994, Grecian was asked by a New Jersey prosecutor to provide evidence for an American lawsuit against the United States company Rexon, against which similar charges of selling arms to Iraq had been levied. Grecian provided evidence to the prosecutor in London—evidence that was witnessed by his legal representative, by a lawyer for Rexon, and by Donald Davidson, assistant prosecutor of the state of New Jersey.

That evidence destroyed Davidson's case against the company, and as a result of Grecian's evidence the proceedings against Rexon executives were dropped, and the company pleaded guilty to a technical offence. Although the state charges against Rexon were dropped, those raised in the United States against Grecian were not.

In January 1995, Grecian visited his girlfriend in South Africa. It was during that visit that his solicitor in the United Kingdom told him that he was wanted by Interpol. Her Majesty's Customs in the United Kingdom later revealed that the United States Justice Department had issued a red-notice extradition order. Normally, those against whom extradition orders are raised are advised of their situation, and offered the opportunity to take legal advice and dispute the charges on which such orders have been raised; a red-notice warrant, however, requires no such advice.

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

The warrant raised against Grecian was apparently active in 176 countries, including the United Kingdom—where, significantly, no attempt was made to execute it. A letter from the British consul general in Johannesburg, dated 8 February 1996, confirms that

"The United States authorities approached Interpol in London in June 1995 asking them to trace Paul which they did. Interpol told the US authorities to submit extradition papers. To date these papers have not been submitted."

In October 1995, the United Kingdom court appeal was held, and the Government finally released documents illustrating Ordtec's innocence. Further documents were released following the insistence of the Lord Chief Justice. The convictions of Grecian and his co-defendants were quashed, and they left the Court of Appeal free men. Although justice was finally done in the United Kingdom, however, we should reflect on the five-year period during which the four men were branded criminals, and therefore unable to pursue either substantial careers or a normal life style. That was because of a Government cover-up.

In the autumn of 1995, Grecian planned a further personal trip to South Africa. He had been given influential contacts in the South African police with whom he could check his freedom and safety to travel. Grecian raised the visit with three South African officials, including the local head of Interpol in South Africa, Colonel David Bruce. All of them gave him the go-ahead. He now believes that he was trapped into going to Johannesburg by South African officials.

As a final precaution before his journey, Grecian had two meetings with a Mr. Fuche of the South African high commission in London. Similar assurances were provided. Given those assurances, Grecian decided to travel to South Africa. On 14 December 1995, he left London for Capetown, on a journey that included a flight change at Johannesburg.

At Johannesburg, Grecian was arrested. The arrest was the result of an Interpol red notice—a document of which the British authorities had been aware, and had ignored for more than a year. The charges were breach of United States arms export control legislation and bank fraud. It is believed that the charge of bank fraud was made in an attempt to secure extradition on the other charges, which, being customs offences, were not extraditable.

On 18 December 1995, at the South African magistrates court at Kempton Park in Johannesburg, both Colonel Bruce and Mr. Fuche denied having any previous conversations with Grecian. It was also revealed that Colonel Bruce was the executive director of Interpol South Africa, and that Mr. Fuche was a detective superintendent in the South African police.

The charge of bank fraud had been raised on the basis of a letter of credit issued by Bank Mellon, regarding funds for the shipment of fuse parts from the United States to the United Kingdom on behalf of Grecian's previous company, Ordtec. The letter was written by the bank, and the wording was prepared by its staff, under no influence of Grecian or his former colleagues. In fact, the goods were never shipped. Given those two points, the relevance of the letter to a charge of bank fraud is nebulous.

Despite the flimsy status of the charges, Grecian was not granted bail on that occasion for a number of reasons: he was an habitual fugitive from justice; he had substantial hidden financial resources; and British secret services would smuggle him out of South Africa or provide him with a second passport.

An appeal was set for three days later, a period during which Grecian's family gathered various documents as evidence in his favour. The documents included his diary, which included entries of the meetings held with Mr. Fuche in London, and British Telecom bills, which itemised telephone calls made to Mr. Wright and to Mr. Bruce in South Africa.

Information was gathered to counter the reasons that were given against bail. There was proof that Grecian had been required to report weekly to the UK police during a two-year period in which he was under investigation for the original arms to Iraq charges, and proof that he had no access to a passport, clearly showing that he was not a habitual fugitive of justice. There was evidence detailing Grecian's bankruptcy and his reliance for income on social security in London, almost from the date of his arrest until very recently.

On 21 December 1995, a second appeal was held in Kempton Park magistrates court. Evidence proving previous contact with Mr. Fuche and Mr. Bruce was presented, and they reacted by amending their story to say that they had spoken with Grecian but had advised him not to travel.

Despite the evidence of Mr. Fuche and Mr. Bruce, the evidence submitted by his family against the charges of bank fraud and perjury and that presented against the reasons for refusing bail, the request for bail was again turned down at that hearing, but on a number of new grounds. First, he was a foreigner. Secondly, he had no fixed abode in South Africa. Thirdly, he would probably have had access to false passports. Fourthly, the magistrates could not believe that Grecian thought he was safe to travel, and believed that he must have known that he was travelling at risk. Fifthly, he was defended by a prominent Queen's counsel in his case in the UK, thereby demonstrating his access to substantial funds. The concept of legal aid was not even recognised by the South African magistrate. The final reason for refusing bail was that he possessed a fax machine, which was another clear sign of wealth.

Grecian appealed for bail to the Supreme Court of South Africa. Since he has been held in South Africa, he has been in court six times. On 4 January 1996, the appeal was heard at the Supreme Court, and a further request for bail was made. Bail was again denied, again for different reasons: Grecian had refused to go to the United States voluntarily; he had been acquitted in the UK on a technicality, so double jeopardy did not arise; in the past, the British high commission in South Africa had assisted those on bail to flee the country; and that, in this case, British intelligence would place a submarine off the South African shore to remove Grecian from their jurisdiction.

On 22 January, Grecian again appeared in the magistrates court. He again presented an application for bail and requested that all information regarding any possible extradition be provided to the defence. The magistrate dismissed all applications. In his solicitor's words, the magistrate was

"extremely hostile and refused to listen to all their arguments."

In a letter from prison, dated 27 February, to the British high commissioner to South Africa, Paul Grecian wrote:

"Whilst I am incarcerated in Modderbee it is impossible for me to provide the input required by my legal representatives . . . I am in no position to generate funds to pay for my legal team and face the prospect of losing the services of my lawyers here in South African in the very near future."

The application for extradition has now been postponed until 25 March. After a long adjournment, the magistrate returned to the court and made an order to the effect that the document requesting extradition was defective but that it would be provisionally accepted and that Paul Grecian had to remain in custody. By provisionally accepting the document, the magistrate is in effect allowing the state an opportunity to rectify the defect, even though the application has already been brought based on the defective request.

Finally, I deal with the view of Grecian's defence counsel during his appeal in the UK last year. I have a note from Geoffrey Robertson QC, which says:

"I am informed that a US prosecutor named Davidson has asserted that the Court of Appeal decision in the Ordtec case in which Paul's plea of guilty was declared invalid and his conviction quashed does not give rise in law to any question of double jeopardy. This is utterly false and, to the extent that it may be affecting the English and South African proceedings, it must be stopped. The fact that the conviction has been quashed means that Paul Grecian can never be tried again for the 'Rexon' offence. Our law is clear to that effect . . . Paul's conviction was quashed on merit, because the documents suppressed by the Prosecution showed that he had a good defence. For this reason the Court of Appeal refused to order a retrial, and indeed the Prosecution did not even ask it to exercise its powers to do so. Personally, I think it is an outrage that the South African courts should bow to American pressure and hold Paul for extradition over a matter to which double jeopardy . . . plainly applies. I suspect that once the truth is investigated by the American courts they too will abandon the prosecution—after Paul has spent several years in jail."

He says that, as soon as his present trial commitments are over, he hopes to be in a position to take up Paul Grecian's case in the international media.

I have asked the South African high commission to look again at this matter. Clearly, something is very wrong. Paul Grecian is a British citizen. As everyone knows, the British Government refused to produce documents which would have supported his defence in 1992. They were not prepared to show that he risked his life gathering intelligence about Iraq and was the first agent to notify the authorities about the supergun.

I think that every hon. Member knows that for more than 13 years I have campaigned as chairperson of the Iraqi Opposition in Britain. I do not usually argue for people who trade in arms—in fact, I think it is a despicable trade—but I will argue for justice on behalf of anyone who has been shown injustice. In this case, it is time that the Government tried to make amends for the many years that Paul Grecian has lost and been branded as a criminal in a situation involving a Government cover-up.

I ask the Minister to make representations to the South African authorities so that Grecian can at least be granted bail and be in a better position to prove his innocence.

9.37 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): Several hon. Members have written to me about Paul Grecian's case and his father, John Grecian, tells me that he has written to every Member of Parliament and a number of Members of the other place. Although I would usually treat as confidential discussions between our consuls and an accused, it is for the convenience of the House and in the interests of an appreciation of the particular circumstances of this case that I welcome this opportunity to put on record the role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Mr. Grecian's case.

As far as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is concerned, Mr. Grecian's predicament is basically a consular matter. Mr. Grecian's situation has nothing to do with his previous relationship with the intelligence services, which was documented in the Scott report.

It may be helpful to hon. Members if I outline the background to the case. In February 1992, Paul Grecian, together with others, faced two conspiracy counts in relation to breaches of the United Kingdom export licensing regime. The Crown alleged that he applied for and obtained export licences to ship a fuse assembly line to Iraq—misdescribed as a valve gauge assembly line—in November 1989. The sub-assemblies were imported to the United Kingdom from a United States company called Rexon and were subsequently returned to the United States in about May 1990. Mr. Grecian entered a plea of guilty, but he subsequently appealed to the Court of Appeal, and the appeal was determined in his favour on the ground of material irregularity in non-disclosure.

On 13 December 1993, the United States district court issued a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Grecian for conspiracy to violate the United States Export Control Act, making false statements to the United States Department of State in order to obtain the export licence and for bank fraud, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). A red notice was issued in 1994 through the Interpol network at the request of the United States authorities. A country can issue an Interpol red notice to alert other countries that a person is wanted in that country to face charges and that that person's extradition will be sought from a country with which there is an extradition treaty. Her Majesty's Government do not treat a red notice as an automatic arrest warrant.

At the request of the United States authorities, the Interpol office in the United Kingdom traced Mr. Grecian and told the United States authorities in June 1995 that the United Kingdom would require extradition papers before any action could be considered. To date, the United States authorities have not submitted extradition papers to Her Majesty's Government.

We now move to the more recent past and the matter of Paul Grecian's arrest in South Africa. As the hon. Lady stated, Mr. Grecian was arrested at Johannesburg airport on 15 December 1995 while travelling from the United Kingdom to visit his fiancée in Cape Town. He was arrested on the strength of the red notice issued by Interpol at the request of the United States authorities. Our consular staff were informed of Mr. Grecian's arrest in the early evening of 15 December by Mr. Grecian's lawyer at the time, Mr. Matzeorf. Our consular duty officer was able to speak to Mr. Grecian over the phone that evening.

A bail hearing was held on 18 December, when Mr. Grecian was remanded in custody until 21 December to give the South African authorities sufficient time to

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

consider his application. The bail hearing was held over 21 and 22 December and the application was refused. Mr. Grecian was remanded in custody until 22 January 1996 and he was subsequently transferred from Pretoria Moot police station to Modderbee prison. The magistrate hearing the bail application refused the application, because he was not satisfied that Mr. Grecian would adhere to the bail conditions.

Before the 21 and 22 December hearing, our consul in Johannesburg, Miss Ann Thiel, visited Mr. Grecian on 20 December at Pretoria Moot police station. She was accompanied by Mr. Grecian's lawyer, Mr. Hodes. The meeting was private—no police officers present—and lasted almost two hours. Mr. Grecian told Miss Thiel that he had previously visited South Africa between 2 and 13 January 1995. Before his departure from South Africa, he said that he had received a call from his lawyer in the United Kingdom to say that an Interpol extradition warrant raised in the United States had been issued for his arrest. Mr. Grecian left South Africa as planned and seemingly without problem in January 1995.

Mr. Grecian said that he had contacted the South African high commission in London and the Interpol office in Pretoria in September 1995 asking whether it would be safe for him to visit South Africa to finalise his wedding plans. He said that he received oral assurances that, as far as the South African authorities were aware, no red notice had been issued for his detention. The South African high commission has rejected that claim, and says that both he and his UK solicitors were told of the Interpol notice against him and that he was warned that he risked being arrested and extradited to the United States if he returned to South Africa.

After Mr. Grecian's transfer to Modderbee prison, Miss Thiel, our consul, contacted the prison authorities and asked that he be given his own cell because of an attempted assault on him by other detainees while at the court. The prison authorities agreed to the request, and Mr. Grecian's father has acknowledged Miss Thiel's role in that.

Miss Thiel visited Mr. Grecian at Modderbee prison on 31 December and the commander of the prison, Colonel Nolte, was present at that meeting. Colonel Nolte told Miss Thiel that he had been contacted by the premier of Gauteng province, where the prison is located, and he had heard reports that Mr. Grecian was being mistreated in the prison. Mr. Grecian told Miss Thiel that that was definitely not the case, and that, despite his ordeal, he was in reasonable spirits.

A further application for bail was heard on 4 January 1996, and it was again refused. As before, the magistrate was not satisfied that Mr. Grecian would honour his bail conditions if released. The magistrate believed that Mr. Grecian would flee to the UK. Mr. Grecian's defence asserted that he would not be able to leave South Africa. The magistrate believed that Mr. Grecian would be able to obtain a second passport in addition to the one that is being held by the South African authorities.

Mr. Grecian made a further court appearance on 22 January, at which his bail application was refused, and he was remanded in custody until 16 February. When Miss Thiel visited Mr. Grecian on 31 January, he was again in good spirits and appeared well. He told Miss Thiel that he received regular phone calls from his fiancée and his father, and he acknowledged that the conditions where he now was were better, but we continue to monitor his welfare.

Mr. Grecian's first extradition hearing was held on 16 February, and the prosecution submitted the extradition papers, which were received from the UK authorities. The defence claimed that the request for extradition was flawed in that it had been submitted to the Department of Foreign Affairs, not the Minister of Justice. The defence claimed that the request was not therefore valid under the US-South African extradition treaty; the prosecution argued that the request was valid and asked the magistrate for an order for extradition. The defence lawyer said that he had received the extradition papers only two days previously and asked for a postponement to give him time to consider the documentation. The case was subsequently adjourned until 25 March.

Our consul, Miss Thiel, visited Mr. Grecian again on 19 February. He was well, but complained that his conditions in the prison had been restricted. He said that he was no longer allowed to wander around the prison and was restricted to making two telephone calls a day. Miss Thiel raised those complaints with Colonel Nolte. Colonel Nolte confirmed that the prison authorities had tried to be as helpful to Mr. Grecian as possible, allowing him privileges that other prisoners were not usually allowed. However, other detainees in the prison had complained at that apparent unfairness, and Mr. Grecian was now receiving the same treatment as other prisoners in Modderbee who were on remand.

Mr. Grecian's father has argued that, because the US district court charge of conspiracy is similar to the one that Mr. Grecian faced in the UK in relation to UK law, this is a case of double jeopardy, as the hon. Lady clearly set out. If Mr. Grecian's legal advisers believe that double jeopardy might apply to the facts of his case, they will no doubt argue the point before the South African court. It is now for the South African court to decide whether Mr. Grecian will be extradited to the United States and, if so, on which charges he would be extradited.

As to whether the United Kingdom authorities should demand Mr. Grecian's release, it is contrary to international practice for official intervention to be made in cases before foreign courts which are still sub judice and until all local legal procedures have been completed. Consideration is then given to such intervention if there are prima facie grounds for believing that there has been a miscarriage of justice. Since his arrest, Mr. Grecian has received, and will continue to receive, full consular support from our staff in South Africa. The same support would be extended to any British citizen in Mr. Paul Grecian's situation.

We shall continue to monitor the case closely, and our consular staff will do all that they properly can to help Mr. Grecian. I give the hon. Lady the assurance tonight that, if there are any further details of which she should be informed, I will write to her personally. I thank her for her interest in Paul Grecian's case.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 8 March 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Treasure Bill

Order for Second Reading read.—[Queen's and Prince of Wales's consent signified.]

9.34 am

Sir Anthony Grant (South-West Cambridgeshire): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House will note that the Bill is supported by all parties, and that my distinguished sponsors come from the three major parties. I am especially pleased to see in his place as one of my sponsors the former Secretary of State for National Heritage, my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). I am grateful to him for his support.

It may surprise hon. Members to know that the Bill seeks to replace a law that goes back to the middle ages, and that the medieval law of treasure trove provides virtually the only legal protection that currently exists for antiquities that are found in the soil of England and Wales. An eminent legal authority, Professor Norman Palmer, has aptly described treasure trove as a mediaeval lottery.

The account of treasure trove to be found in a manual on English law written by a mediaeval lawyer called Bracton more than 700 years ago, pretty much describes the current position. I suppose that, historically, it was Richard Coeur de Lion, anxious to finance his crusades, who wanted to lay his hands on any gold and silver he could get, because we were on the gold standard in those days.

This is an historic occasion, because to my knowledge it is the first time that the subject of treasure trove has been debated in the Chamber. The subject, which is important for all those who have an interest in our nation's heritage, has been discussed in the other place a number of times. I am delighted to raise the issue in our House for the first time.

What is the law on treasure trove, what does it do, and why am I seeking to replace it? Only objects made of gold or silver which have been deliberately buried with the intention of recovery and of which the owner is unknown can be declared treasure trove. Someone who finds an object made of gold or silver has always had a legal duty to report it to the coroner without delay.

The coroner will decide whether to hold a treasure inquest, and the jury at the inquest is asked to decide whether the object in question was likely to have been buried with the intention of recovery, or whether it was more likely to have been lost or abandoned. I need hardly say that that is often an impossible question to answer.

If a find is a hoard of Roman gold coins in a pot, it might seem fairly obvious that its original owner did not lose it or abandon it, but buried it for safe keeping, hoping to come back to recover it. But what if the find is a single item of gold jewellery or a prehistoric gold bracelet? How can we possibly expect to know how an object came to be deposited in the ground 3,000 years ago? But that is the question that treasure inquest juries are regularly asked to decide. To make matters more complicated, a substantial sum of money can often depend on the outcome, because, if the object is treasure trove, the finder will get the reward, whereas, if it is not, the landowner may be able to claim it.

When a find has been declared treasure trove, in law it is the property of the Crown. In practice, that means that a museum has a right to acquire it, but the finder receives an ex gratia reward equivalent to its full market value. Any objects that are not required by a museum are returned, normally to the finder, and an independent committee has the job of determining the market value of such objects. That system of paying rewards to finders based on the full market value works well on the whole, but there are some problems.

Responsible finders will have made an agreement to split any reward equally with the landowner as a condition of being given permission to search on his land, but not all of them do so. Hon. Members will be surprised to learn that the finder will still receive a full reward even if he has been trespassing. Under present law, under no circumstances are landowners eligible for rewards. Only if the finder has behaved dishonestly or improperly—for example, if he has concealed his find—will the Secretary of State for National Heritage pay a reduced reward or none at all.

My Bill will, for the first time, make both landowners and occupiers eligible for rewards. That is one of the reasons why I am pleased that the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union support the Bill. Landowners and occupiers will receive rewards under certain limited circumstances—for example, if the finder had been trespassing. I want to stress, however, that in the majority of cases, where the finder has permission to be on the land, it is expected that he will continue to receive the full reward, as at present.

So what are the problems of treasure trove? As I have mentioned, the greatest weakness is the need to determine whether the original owner of the find concealed it with the intention of coming back to recover it later, or whether he simply lost or abandoned it. It is absurd and ludicrous to think that we can understand today the motives that led owners to bury objects such as gold torcs several thousand years ago, yet that question regularly arises at inquests.

In any case, it is an irrelevant consideration when deciding whether antiquities should be preserved for the nation. My Bill would provide protection to all objects other than coins that are at least 300 years old and that have a precious metal content of at least 5 per cent., however they came to be placed in the ground. We have adopted a different definition for coins.

[Sir Anthony Grant]

What is more, single objects, however important they might be, are seldom declared treasure trove, because it is generally considered that they are more likely to have been lost than deliberately buried. One good example is the Middleham jewel, discovered in Yorkshire with a metal detector in 1985, and the most important piece of mediaeval jewellery discovered in England this century. It was not treasure trove, as it could not be shown to have been deliberately buried with the intention of recovery, and it was lost to the nation.

Another such example is the famous Sutton Hoo ship burial in East Anglia, the most important Anglo-Saxon find in this country. That too was not legally treasure trove, because it could not be shown to have been buried with the intention of recovery. As a result, it was possible for the British museum to acquire that unique find for the nation only through the generosity of the landowner, Mrs. Pretty. She would have been within her rights to sell the whole find on the market, where it would have been dispersed, but, to her credit, because of her public spirit, she did not do so.

The second problem with treasure trove is that it includes only objects that contain a substantial proportion of gold or silver, so it affords no protection to the great majority of archaeological finds, even though they may be of great historical or cultural value. Despite a recent Appeal Court judgment that objects had to contain "substantial" amounts of gold or silver to qualify for treasure trove, each find that has occurred since then has been dealt with differently.

Several hoards containing gold and silver objects of varying degrees of fineness have been split into parts that have been declared treasure trove, and parts that have not. What is more, many entire hoards of Roman coins are currently not treasure trove, because they are made of base silver or bronze. As there is no requirement to report them, many are legally sold and dispersed before they can be recorded, and so are gone for ever. Thus, the information they contain is lost for ever.

Let me give the House one example. In 1986, a hoard of about 1,500 Roman bronze coins was found at Amersham. It has come to light only because the finder's mother wrote an account of its discovery in *Take A Break*. No record of it was ever made, because its finder sold it on the market and it was broken up shortly afterwards, all legally under present law.

Under my Bill, all hoards of coins that are at least 300 years old will be treasure, except for those that consist just of bronze coins, in which case there will be a minimum number of 10. However—I stress this, because I heard some misleading remarks on television this morning—single coins, which are common finds, will not be treasure.

Another anomaly of the current system is that objects that are made of base metal or other material receive no legal protection, even if they are found in association with objects of treasure. Therefore, the pots in which coin hoards are found are not declared treasure trove, even though they may be of considerable archaeological importance.

The engraved gems from the Roman jeweller's hoard found at Snettisham in Norfolk in 1986 were not treasure trove, and that was an important find containing silver jewellery, silver and bronze coins and a fine group of more than 100 cornelian gems. The precious metal objects were duly declared treasure trove, but the gems, the bronze coins and the pot were excluded. That is illogical. Under my Bill, the objects found with treasure would also be protected.

I want to consider the problems of enforcement. In the past few years, a number of cases have shown all too clearly how weak the law is. At present, a person who is found guilty of concealing treasure trove can be prosecuted for theft of Crown property, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment. In practice, however, there have been few, if any, successful prosecutions for such concealment, because it is virtually impossible to prove beyond reasonable doubt that an object must have been buried with the intention of recovery.

The prosecution of a man who was apprehended with coins from an important hoard found in 1984 in Wanborough in Surrey failed for that reason. The result is that only a small part of the hoard has been preserved, and no record has been made of the coins, many of which have ended up abroad and been dispersed.

Another case concerned a group of nearly 600 Celtic coins, all of the same type, seized by Customs and Excise at Heathrow. An inquest was held to decide whether they were treasure trove. Two days were spent discussing such arcane matters as the religious customs of the ancient Celts to decide whether the coins had been buried with the intention of recovery, or whether there was another more probable explanation.

The poor jury decided that the coins were not treasure trove. It is significant that even the solicitor acting on behalf of the dealer was frustrated by the subjective nature of the question that the inquest had to decide. He has since gone on record as saying:

"Treasure trove is an anachronistic law ... I hope this important inquest leads to a radical revision of the treasure trove law."

The lesson seems to be that it is virtually impossible to enforce treasure trove law, especially if objects had been removed from the soil and had entered the trade.

My Bill would have dealt with the problems thrown up by both those cases—first, by making the judgment whether a particular object was treasure a straightforward matter of fact; secondly, by making it an offence to fail to report treasure finds within 14 days without reasonable excuse.

At present, the law requires finders to report treasure trove promptly. If they fail to do so, they could, as I said, be prosecuted for theft of Crown property, but, in any case, it is likely that they will receive a reduced reward or none. If we are going to have a law that covers such finds—virtually every country does—we must ensure that it can be enforced. I am not saying that my Bill will deal with all the problems of illicit excavation—such as the nighthawks who steal objects from other people's land—but it will make a start by removing the most serious deficiencies of treasure trove law.

I have heard that some hon. Members are puzzled about why Scotland is excluded from my Bill. That is because it already has a far better arrangement, as one might expect. In Scotland, all newly discovered archaeological objects, whatever they are made of and however they came to be in the ground, belong to the Crown under the legal principle of bona vacantia.

Northern Ireland has the same treasure trove law as England and Wales, which is why it is included in the scope of the Bill, although there is a statutory duty to report all archaeological objects in the Province. In England and Wales, we provide less protection for our heritage of portable antiquities than virtually any other European country. Almost every other civilised country has passed laws to protect portable antiquities, and in all those countries, legal protection such as that proposed in the Bill is seen as completely normal.

The Bill is backed by the Surrey Archaeological Society and the British museum. It was first introduced, in a slightly different form, by Lord Perth in 1994 in the other place. His Bill obtained the backing of all those who took part in the debate, including representatives of all parties. However, it failed in this House, because it received no time for debate.

The Bill was drafted after consulting a wide range of interests and organisations, including representatives of the police, magistrates, coroners, landowners, district councils, county councils, museums, dealers and archaeological societies. All those organisations, including the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union, the Council of British Archaeology, the Museums Association, the Museums and Galleries Commission and the main dealers' associations, have indicated their support for the reform of the archaic law of treasure trove.

I know that the National Council for Metal Detecting is still considering the Bill. I repeat firmly that the Bill is not hostile to metal detectorists. I know that, when the Bill's sponsors have been able to explain its provisions to detectorists, most of them appreciate that fact. The Bill contains no restriction on metal detecting, but simply clarifies what should and should not be reported.

Some metal detecting interests have, unfortunately, mounted a campaign against the Bill, totally misrepresenting it as a first step towards banning metal detecting. Nothing could be further from the truth. My noble Friend Lord Inglewood, the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage, recently gave that assurance in the report of the treasury trove reviewing committee for 1994-95. He said:

"I want to emphasise that neither the Government, nor the European Union, has any plans to ban or restrict responsible metal detecting."

I hope that we may hear a similar reassurance from my hon. Friend the Minister today. I personally consider that responsible detectorists have an important role to play in bringing our national heritage to light for the benefit of us all. I believe that we can all work together in this respect.

I add my voice to Lord Inglewood's in congratulating all finders who report their finds promptly to the proper authorities. Without the co-operation of those finders, a great deal of valuable information about our nation's past would be lost. In recent years, metal detectorists have discovered many objects of great importance to the nation's heritage.

One of the best examples is the great find of late Roman gold and silver coins and other objects made at Hoxne in Suffolk in 1992 by Mr. Eric Lawes. The find was sensibly reported by Mr. Lawes on the day of discovery, thus enabling the Suffolk archaeological unit to excavate the site the following day. As a result, much valuable information concerning the circumstances of the hoard's burial was recovered which would otherwise have been lost.

That is an example of co-operation between metal detectorists and archaeologists at its best. I hope that my Bill will encourage the process by bringing both parties together to work out how to operate the system for everyone's, and the nation's, benefit.

I understand that officials from the Department of National Heritage have had a series of meetings with the National Council for Metal Detecting to discuss the Bill. After receiving a critique of the Bill from the council, three significant amendments were made to it. At a subsequent meeting, the council requested one further amendment to the Bill and clarification on another point, both of which the Department was able to give.

I had hoped to have a meeting with the council a few weeks ago, but it was not ready for one then. However, I am always available. Our discussions with the national council are continuing, and I am ready to meet it at any time and to hear any suggestions it might have, so that we can take another look at them before the Committee stage. I do not think that I can be fairer than that.

Lord Perth's Bill failed in 1994, and it has taken until now before the Treasure Bill could be reintroduced. I know, however, that the time has not been wasted, because the Department of National Heritage has been able to carry out discussions on the Bill with a range of interested organisations. Those discussions have served to reaffirm support for the pragmatic approach we are adopting. The Department has also been able to develop its proposals on the wider issue of the recording of portable antiquities which have now been published.

A recent survey by the Council of British Archaeology estimated that about 400,000 archaeological objects are found each year. To put the matter in perspective, we believe that the Bill may increase the number of cases of treasure from about 25 a year at present to between 100 and 200, and some of the hoards may consist of many individual objects. I know that the Government recognise that the Bill deals with only part of the problem, and I welcome the fact that the Department of National Heritage has recently published a discussion document on portable antiquities, which contains proposals for a voluntary scheme for recording all finds, not just those covered by my Bill. I believe that the two initiatives complement each other well.

I know that many people have worked hard on the Bill over many years. First and foremost, the name of Lord Perth springs to mind. Without his determination, his persistence and his refusal to take no for an answer, the whole project would never have got off the ground. He has been ably aided and abetted by Lord Renton and Lord Renfrew in the other place—both, happily, from the county of Cambridgeshire.

David Graham, Stewart Lyon and Lady Hanworth of the Surrey Archaeological Society have worked tirelessly on treasure trove reform for many years, and they have been assisted by Professor Norman Palmer of University college, London, to whom I referred earlier, and Doctor Andrew Burnett of the British museum. I take this opportunity to express my thanks to them all. I am especially grateful to Dr. Roger Bland of the British museum, who has given me enormous help in the matter, in which he is an acknowledged expert.

[Sir Anthony Grant]

My Bill has three aims. First, it will change the definition of treasure by removing the need to prove that objects must have been intentionally buried, by making it clear exactly how much gold or silver objects must contain to be defined as treasure, and by including objects found in clear archaeological association with finds of treasure. Secondly, it will streamline the system by making it much simpler to determine what is treasure. Thirdly, it will make the law enforceable by providing a new offence for the non-declaration of treasure.

For finders, the Bill places no restrictions on metal detecting, while it safeguards their rights to continue to receive full rewards for their finds, except where they have been trespassing. The Bill provides landowners with the right to be informed of finds of treasure that have been reported from their land—they do not have that right at present—and it makes them eligible for rewards if, for example, the finder has been trespassing. Again, they do not have that right at present.

The Bill will require minimal additional resources, and it will make an important improvement to the legal protection afforded to objects found in the soil of this country, which are, after all, our heritage. I stress that no one will lose under the Bill—neither landowners nor finders—except the criminal element. No one now argues that we should keep the status quo. The successful passage of the Bill will have a symbolic importance far beyond the significance of its individual provisions, as it will represent the first piece of antiquities legislation ever passed in England and Wales.

We desperately need to do something now about the situation before all antiquities have been removed from the ground. Antiquities are a non-renewable resource, and they will be gone for ever if we do not act now. The Bill represents the best chance for making progress in an area that has eluded others for 150 years. I warmly commend it to the House.

9.58 am

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): When my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) opened the debate, in his usual exemplary way, I wondered whether I was entirely alone in feeling a slight feeling of nostalgia and regret on hearing that a piece of legislation that had stood the test of time—for about 700 years—was to disappear. That may seem a strange thing for a legislator to say. However, I take the view that if a piece of legislation has lasted for a long time, it is not unreasonable to assume that it might still have some useful working life.

The idea that Members of Parliament, even those as distinguished as the gathering here today, will be able to produce a piece of legislation that is automatically better than something that has stood the test of time must be considered. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire will not take it amiss if I say that, as a Conservative, I at least start from the assumption that 700 years' worth of established history suggests a pretty good basis on which to work.

People have said to me over the years that there is something particularly arcane about treasure trove. I am not sure there is. However it may work in practice, the law on treasure trove makes a degree of sense, and fits perfectly well with established legal principles.

As I understand it, it simply amounts to the following. Under the law of intestacy—if no will is made willing away property that has been left—the Crown automatically inherits property. That principle would apply today if one of us died and did not leave provisions. Our assets, and in some cases our debts, would be left to the Crown. It is a straightforward process that valuables without any apparent ownership should go to the Crown, and perfectly fair that the law should operate in that way.

We live in a somewhat cynical age, however, and I am sure that somewhere some journalist is already sucking his pencil and saying to himself, "What on earth is Parliament doing spending a whole Friday debating such a subject?" That is a fair point.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): A whole Friday?

Mr. Nicholls: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not being provocative. The question could apply to debating such a measure for just part of Friday.

The law relating to treasure trove in its apparent and even manifest inadequacies has not featured hugely in my life. I cannot say that my postbag is full of letters from aggrieved treasure seekers or treasure acquisitionists who are upset about the state of the law. Nor are my surgeries full of such complaints. Indeed, when I get back to my constituency—like the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), I hope that it is sooner rather than later—I do not expect to be regaled with complaints about the law relating to treasure trove.

The complaints will be rather more mundane. I shall encounter the usual traffic that comes to Members of Parliament, plus this week especially, the law relating to fish rather than treasure. Such things concern people rather more. Nevertheless, as my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire said, the Bill deals with our heritage, in a sense our own memories, and it is right that the House of Commons should take time to consider them. It says much for the subject that we have managed to assemble a representation of the quality of the House rather than its quantity.

When I realised that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire was introducing such legislation, I wondered who it was aimed at. I like his idea that there would be no losers apart from rascals and only winners, but I always feel slightly worried when I hear such proposals.

Indeed, I have received at least one series of representations from a friend of mine over the years who is a detectorist. He has told me that he feels that legislation is inevitable, that it would be aimed against detectorisation—if there is such a word—and that it was all rather sad. I must admit that I would not have thought that of my hon. Friend, and I was reassured when I discovered that he was the Bill's promoter. I had wondered, however, whether there was not some incipient intellectual snobbery at work against strange people who put on their shell suits, take the whippet out for a walk and take a metal detector with them; that something was not quite right about them.

It also occurred to me that the Bill might be a result of an over-emphasis on the idea that treasure should automatically go to museums. I sometimes have difficulty with that idea, too. Most of us can remember as children

being taken around museums, which 20 or 30 years ago in no sense stimulated one's awareness of the past and desire to know more about it—so many dusty covers on wet days to walk around and look at. All that is changed and I accept that. Museums are now entertaining places. If the driving force behind the Bill had been to ensure that oiks were not going round finding things and keeping them, and that instead articles could be safely locked up in a museum, I would have had some difficulty with it.

A great many things go into museums that never see the light of day again, because there is simply not enough display space. I therefore find it slightly difficult to accept that an item is lost for ever to the national heritage because it is discovered, sold and retained in private hands, rather than filed, categorised, archivised and locked away in a vault for ever to safeguard the national heritage.

That point was also made by the discovery of a hoard in 1985 in Normanby in Lincolnshire of no fewer than 47,912 base silver coins, to which my hon. Friend referred in passing. The briefing that I have says that it took several members of the British museum staff well over a year to clean and study all the coins. While reading that, I wondered whether it was so terribly important that all those coins should be filed away in a museum for ever instead of, perhaps, being sold on the open market.

Having said that, one appreciates the problem at once of ensuring that all the information that can be gleaned from a hoard is gathered, although one has to think what precisely is the point of confining all the coins in a museum. It is legitimate to question precisely what is behind the Bill.

I am also concerned not only as a legislator but as a lawyer about the fact that, the moment we try to cure one set of anomalies, we usually create another set. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire is a lawyer, and I know that he will also have paid particular regard to that.

We might need to consider the fact that the law of treasure trove concerns composition and depends on the degree of silver and gold in any items acquired, which is almost approaching the matter from the wrong angle. Since we are talking about the preservation of the national heritage, an item—my hon. Friend implicitly referred to it—can be of the utmost significance and interest even if it is not valuable in scrap terms if it were melted down and sold. We therefore have to be careful in changing the law, so as not to latch on to the conventional value of an item, because anomalies will occur.

I notice that, even in a relatively straightforward Bill, clause 1(1)(d)(i) is quite complex, because it states that something is capable of being treasure providing that it is found in association with other treasure. That suggests right away a degree of anomaly because unless there is one conventionally valuable item at a site, everything else will not be deemed treasure.

That concerns me greatly, because other examples can be cited. For instance, I understand that bronze coins will not qualify as treasure unless at least one conventionally valuable item is found with them. That suggests problems. Perhaps the Minister will be able to explain why that should be so.

I am similarly concerned that, if only one item were found, it could not be treasure trove. That points to a practical difficulty. One might not always know whether one has found just one item. If one finds one item in one field and another in another field, are they associated finds? Presumably not—that is an easy point. The far harder point to resolve is what happens if one finds one item, and 20, 30 or 40 yd away one suddenly finds another. One of the problems of trying to cure anomalies with legislative weaponry is that it creates other anomalies. I not quite sure what the answer is, and I can imagine that such situations will cause problems.

Although ownership is not a major shortcoming of the Bill, it needs to be addressed. My initial reaction to the Bill and the work that has been done on it was that, if we were going to take a fairly radical approach—if we were no longer to work on the basis that treasure deliberately hidden with retrieval in mind belonged to the Crown, and that, if it had merely been abandoned, the finder would be entitled to it—such an approach should reflect modern reality and common sense. That would surely mean dealing with the question of ownership. If an item or piece is found on land, the assumption should be that the person on whose land it is is the owner. That was the position from which I was originally coming.

To be fair, however, it can be seen there are difficulties with that approach. If the underlying intent or purpose of the Bill is to preserve examples of the national heritage, there may be a case for saying that the rights of property and ownership must be overridden so that the national heritage is to benefit. If we have to go that far, however, the assumption should still be that the person who would derive the advantage—the reward, perhaps—should be the owner of the land.

There have been extraordinary cases in which the owner of the land has not benefited. I think that my hon. Friend referred in passing to a case at Donhead St. Mary. A hoard of iron age gold coins was declared to be treasure trove. It was discovered by metal detection. The hoard was valued at £5,210. The Treasury decided to reduce the reward to £2,000 because the finder had been convicted for searching on a scheduled monument.

The person who received the ultimate reward had acted, by any stretch of the imagination, in a thoroughly meretricious way. Apparently, the landowner was aggrieved that he was not entitled to any reward. We can imagine that he might well have felt aggrieved. It surely defies any sense of justice and common sense that, if something is found, it is not the owner of the land who is rewarded but the trespasser as well.

An even more shocking case took place at Burton Overy, where 282 silver coins of the 17th century were found by an electrician while working in the loft of a house. The coins were declared treasure trove. In due course, it was the electrician who received the reward and not the owner of the house. That may appeal to some people's ideas of egalitarianism. It is the marvellous story of an electrician—a humble working man—who changes a plug and walks off with treasure trove worth £9,700.

That is slightly troubling. I would like to think—I hope that the issue will be clarified in due course—that the person who would benefit under the Bill in those circumstances would be the owner of the land, not the person who simply comes upon treasure trove.

These are matters that might be of interest, or almost of reassurance, to honest and reputable detectorists as against those who are not. There is no injustice in saying that it

[Mr. Nicholls]

is the owner of the land who should benefit, not the finder. The relationship between owner and finder should be straightforward enough.

If someone goes on to someone else's land with metal detection equipment, he must ask permission to do so. If he does not request that permission, he is a trespasser, and should not be entitled to benefit from the fruits of his trespass. If someone wants to go on someone else's land with a metal detector, presumably he would say to the owner of the land, "I have a certain expertise in the handling of this detection equipment and I know where to look. If I come on to your land and I find something, can we split any reward that might be offered?" If the answer is "Push off", "No", "I want the lot", or "I shall not split it with you in that way", no bargain has been reached. In those circumstances the owner is not prepared to share the fruits of the other person's expertise, there is no contract, there is no problem and no injustice.

In any normal case, the assumption should surely be that the owner will derive the advantage, not the finder. The situation is entirely different, however, if no one knows where the owner of the land is to be found. I would have great difficulty if the only claim that someone had for reward was the mere fact of having found treasure trove, even though there was an owner.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my hon. Friend think that the enactment of the Bill might lead to some rogue metal detectorists going on to land without seeking permission, in the hope that they will retrieve some treasure and be able to make off with it, as opposed to going through the legitimate process of making a bargain with the owner of the land?

Mr. Nicholls: That depends on the person. I have no reason to think that detectorists belonging to a properly constituted and properly set up organisation will not try now to make a bargain or to arrive at some accommodation. If someone has no interest in the heritage and in doing things properly, or in recognising the rights of ownership, he is likely to go on to other people's land. That will be the position whether or not the Bill is enacted. I am troubled that, under current law, and conceivably under the Bill if enacted, someone who is trespassing—someone who is not present under the terms of any arrangement—will still be in a position to derive some advantage having found treasure trove.

What will be the balance of reward between the owner and the finder? The Bill does not make that entirely clear. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire said that there would be an obligation under the Bill for reasonable efforts to be made to find the owner of the land. I am not sure how significant that is in reality. In most instances, the identity of the owner of the land would be obvious. If there is an obligation to make some rudimentary inquiries, what would be the purpose of so doing? What is the balance to be between ownership and occupation?

It is clear that a great deal of work has been done in putting the Bill together. There is no doubt that the motives behind it are entirely lawful. The measure is designed to try to preserve the national heritage. Given that a detectorist has told me of his concern that Parliament would introduce legislation that would weigh heavily against detectorists' interests, I am heartened by what my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire has said.

I have read the Bill carefully to discover whether it could be used against responsible detectorists. I have found nothing in my reading of it that should give concern to those people. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying, in effect, that he would make himself available to them at any time, anywhere, to meet their concerns.

At the same time, I have two abiding concerns. First, in linking the nature of treasure trove to things that are valuable per se or where there is a range of items including one that is valuable, it seems that we are creating an artificial barrier that may stop us protecting particular finds, hoards or acquisitions that could be of great interest to archaeologists, and have an interest far greater than their face value.

Secondly, if we, as Conservatives, are to overturn 600 or 700 years' worth of established law, and even if we are to stop country lawyers such as myself having an occasional day out to attend an inquest at which we can ask ourselves thoroughly obscure questions on treasure trove and recite our various Latin tags—in other words, if we are to upset arrangements that have stood the test of time—we should ensure that those who benefit are the national heritage and property owners.

There should be no more cases of people trespassing on other people's land and deriving an advantage from so doing. If I ever find that I have employed an electrician who once used to practise at Burton Overy, and that he ferreted in my house trying to find where my predecessors had buried their goods, I think that I shall be prepared to reach an accommodation with him. The idea that, having fitted a plug, he can go off with treasure and instruct a country lawyer to oppose me at a local inquest, claiming that he has a better right to the treasure than I have, offends my sense of natural justice. I think that it would appal my bank manager as well.

10.18 am

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): The Bill raises a subject of considerable interest to my constituents. Dover has the great advantage that we are always making new discoveries in the form of rare coins or rare pieces of Roman antiquity. In Dover recently, we discovered a bronze age ship that extends Dover's history back through some 4,000 years. When the House contemplates the millennium celebrations for the year 2000, we in Dover feel that the House has not got a true perspective. Dover has a much longer historical perspective.

There have been many local finds in Dover, especially those that go back to Roman times. Julius Caesar tried to land at Dover, but its fortifications, though built well before Dover castle, were such that he could not, and he had to scuttle up the coast to Walmer. We have commemorated the fact that he managed to get ashore there in difficult circumstances despite it being well defended by my former constituents. The defence was so good that many Roman soldiers lost possessions. Detectorists and others take great pleasure in discovering rare Roman coins and other artefacts on the beaches and around Dover and Walmer.

Excellent artefacts, coins and other antiquities that we have been able to secure locally can be found in the Dover museum. I hope that the House will not object to a small

advertisement for Dover museum. Anybody interested in rare Roman coins and antiquities would do well to spend a weekend enjoying what is on offer at our excellent museum. It is situated by the White Cliffs Experience, which runs through the history of life in Dover over some 2,500 years. Many Roman coins and other local artefacts have been placed there for tourists to enjoy. I am sure that my colleagues will want, on their holiday trips that use our excellent ferries, to stop off briefly in Dover for a good visit to the museum.

Our national heritage is of unquestionable importance, and the Bill must be considered in that light. There will be concern about whether the rights of individuals will be limited and genuine freedoms that have been secured over many hundreds of years unfairly dealt with.

We must be conscious of those freedoms, to ensure that we do not discourage a legitimate leisure industry. Many people get much enjoyment from using metal detectors or other methods to discover the nation's antiquities and coins of Roman and other periods. It would be tragic if we passed a Bill that acted as a disincentive to such people, many of whom have served the nation well in discovering rare coins and other pieces that have ended up in our museums.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) on making a powerful argument. We certainly need better arrangements. Britain does not have codified law, and it is good that we do not. Most hon. Members find judge-made law much more satisfactory. Occasionally, Parliament must tackle situations such as this, which for hundreds of years have had no real statutory framework, and lay down some principles. There is a strong argument that the time has arrived to lay down those principles, especially if we can achieve a fairer balance between landowner, discoverer, owner—if he is still around—and the national interest.

Considerable concern was expressed about the previous Bill on this subject, which was introduced by Lord Perth. I received letters from detectorists in my constituency saying that it was too restrictive of legitimate private interests. That is why I was pleased to hear that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire has tried to work with the National Council for Metal Detecting, and that efforts are being made to accommodate its concerns and fears. Provided that the landowner agrees and has been consulted, it a respectable pursuit to go out and look for our antiquities and rare coins. I do not see why we should pass anything in Parliament that would discourage that.

However, we also have a responsibility to try to reconcile that freedom with the national interest, so that future generations can get the enormous pleasure that the many people who visit Dover museum and the White Cliffs Experience get from the rare finds on display, and so that we can increase the number of those finds.

I find nothing more intriguing than taking my young son, who at six is perhaps a little young fully to appreciate the Roman finds, to the museum and the White Cliffs Experience so that he can learn about the nation's heritage and the history of Europe. Such discoveries are one way through which we can teach young people about our history. He has been fascinated by Roman times, and we must do everything possible to ensure that there is a never-ending series of discoveries.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire said, many discoveries are made each year, and a considerable number of them, appropriately, end up in museums. I hope that all the principles that I have enunciated will be taken on board, and that the National Council for Metal Detecting and other organisations or individuals with legitimate concerns can be accommodated.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on clause 1, which is one of the clearest to come before Parliament in some time. It is clear that we are not talking about one or two minor finds, but that there would have to be at least 10 non-precious metal coins in a find before the legislation would apply. That is a good safeguard for people who make casual finds.

Clause 2 deals with the powers of the Secretary of State. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that, because considerable powers would be given to the Secretary of State by the Bill. I am pleased that clause 11 provides for a code of practice about the how the Secretary of State should exercise those powers. It is important that Parliament should have a clear understanding of the matter.

I hope that the Minister will be able, during the Bill's passage, to set the record straight in *Hansard*, so that everyone can be clear about how the powers will operate. We do not want them to change rapidly or become too onerous, based on a bit of advice about which Parliament might not have been informed. We should not always tie Select Committees by legislation into the operation of an Act of Parliament, but it would be helpful if the Minister could say that reference would be made to Parliament, perhaps through the Select Committee, before changes to the code of practice were made.

In clause 6, the Secretary of State has the right of disclaimer. That is an important provision that needs to be amplified. I hope that it will be covered by the code of practice.

Clause 7 talks about doing away with the jury. I notice that there are some 40 to 60 inquests a year by coroners. It would be interesting to know the Minister's thoughts on the way in which juries might operate in future. It would appear that a jury can be convened by the coroner if he or she feels that it is appropriate, but it is important that the coroner has a clear understanding of the circumstances which the Minister or the Secretary of State might consider required the convening of a jury.

I notice that clause 8 establishes a fine of £5,000 or up to three months' imprisonment for contravention of the legislation. Parliament tends to establish fines which are supposed to last 20, 30 or 40 years. Even at the low rate of inflation that we have now, £5,000 might not be high enough to act as a disincentive to people to breach the clauses of the Bill.

I suggest that it might be worth legislating for the future and perhaps considering allowing the fine to be raised to a more realistic figure. We must especially bear it in mind that people might contravene the legislation because they have made a very valuable find and do not want to go through the procedures. It is important that the fine should act as a disincentive. It clearly will not do so if someone decides to breach the legislation because his find is worth perhaps £100,000 and the fine is only £5,000.

I see that, under clause 10, the Secretary of State will be able to determine rewards based on a market value to be determined by the Secretary of State, as he or she

[Mr. David Shaw]

thinks fit. I hope that that means that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will set up some form of procedure under which experts are involved.

I think that our Secretaries of State are wonderful—of course I do, coming from this side of the House—but they might have some difficulties based on their previous experience in life in precisely determining a market value. I therefore hope that some experts will be involved who will understand how the right balance can be determined between the finder, the owner and the occupier of the land.

I look forward to reading the annual report that clause 12 requires. I am glad that legislation is now beginning to require annual reports. As an accountant, I have been used in business to seeing annual reports produced every year. Indeed, many companies produce quarterly or six-monthly reports.

One of the discoveries one make on entering Parliament is that the annual reports that Governments have produced over the years have not been so sophisticated or open in terms of providing information as one would have liked. It is good news that the Government have improved all the annual reports for all Government Departments and that those reports are in much better shape than previously. I hope that, when this annual report is produced, it will be a worthwhile one that will give a lot of information about some of the treasure finds over the previous year.

Perhaps at this stage, without straying off the subject, I might make a plea. The other day I went to the Vote Office and asked for the annual reports of each Government Department that are normally published in February. They are still not available. Those of us who like to get at the figures of Government make a particular plea that the reports do not become antiquities or treasure trove, and are not vastly out of date by the time they are published. I hope that Ministers in various Departments will take note of that request.

In conclusion, the Treasure Bill should, on balance, be advantageous and beneficial to the country. It should be seen as good news by pretty well all the interested parties here. I am sure that it could be improved still further with minor amendments, to make sure that the concerns of the National Council for Metal Detecting are taken on board. In that way, we can be certain that this Bill will adopt fairness between the discoverer, the landowner and possibly the owner, if he or she is still alive, of the property that has been discovered and, of course, the national interest. I welcome the Bill, with the proviso that we should try to maximise the number of people whose concerns have been taken on board.

10.34 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a small contribution to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) on his success in introducing the Bill, which is long overdue—perhaps several hundred years overdue. The Bill will clarify some of the problems that have arisen, particularly in recent years. Unfortunately, I have no personal interest to declare in relation to the Bill.

It is important to ensure that we preserve our heritage. Tourism is the fastest-growing industry in the world, and Britain has more than its fair share of visitors—a number which is increasing at a massive rate. One of the greatest attractions of Britain to people who come from abroad is our history and the artefacts that have been gathered over a long period.

Britain does that awfully well. Museums are littered throughout the country—north, south, east and west. They attract people from all over the world to come and see some of Britain's real history. I hope that the Bill will lead to the discovery of more artefacts, and will enable people who use metal detectors to go out with more knowledge about what the law sayd, and without the uncertainty which has been the problem to date.

One of the main purposes of the Bill is to designate what is treasure trove and what is not. The Bill is right to make it clear that objects which contain at least 5 per cent. by weight of gold or silver and are at least 300 years old are treasure trove. Up to now, treasure trove has been defined as objects which contained "substantial amounts" of gold and silver. For goodness' sake, the position is problematic enough as it is. Who is to state what is substantial and what is not? The specific declaration in the Bill of what is and what is not treasure will be beneficial.

Then there is the problem of coins that do not contain 5 per cent. of gold or silver, but are discovered in hoards. My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said that there would be difficulties in defining a hoard. How close together would the coins have to be before they were so designated? If someone with a metal detector discovers a coin one day, goes back another day and finds a coin not too far from the first, and then on a third day finds another, will that be considered a hoard? There may be a problem there. I hope that, in Committee, the definition of a hoard can be examined again, so that everyone can be clear about it.

The magazine *British Archaeology* said:

"The Bill's main aims are to remove the obligation for coroners' juries to read dead minds".

That is right. It is problematic for a jury to work out whether someone buried something so that it would be discovered at a later date. It is right to remove that problem, and regard anything that is found as treasure.

The previous loophole has led to the loss of some treasure, including, as my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire said, the Middleham jewel, which was worth £2.5 million. Other finds, perhaps not of such great value but of great archaeological interest, may also have been lost.

The Bill also clarifies what would happen with items found in association with treasure trove. As has been said, a number of coins could be discovered in a pot that is of great archaeological interest; the coins have to be designated as treasure, whereas the pot does not. In such cases, the find associated with the coins would be classed as treasure.

Mr. Nicholls: Has my hon. Friend thought of another problem? If one coin cannot be treasure trove, what will happen if there is a massively important find of artefacts with only one coin? The whole find would disappear from the ambit of the Bill, whereas one extra coin would have made all the difference. That is obviously nonsense, but nonsenses can arise. Is that the sort of thing that my hon. Friend wants clarified in Committee?

Mr. Nigel Evans: Yes. The Secretary of State will have flexibility to designate

"additional classes of object as treasure".

Let us take the case of one coin being found in association with a number of important archaeological artifacts. I am not certain whether the Secretary of State will be able to say, after the find has been made public, "I am going to reclassify all that as treasure."

I am not sure whether the powers will be retrospective and whether something that has already been found can be drawn within the ambit of the Bill. I hope that we will deal with that in Committee. However unlikely it is that a number of artefacts will be found in association with only one coin, it is possible, and the last thing we want is for such artefacts to be lost to the nation, or even taken abroad, which could be a problem. That needs to be sorted out.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) said, we need as much clarity as possible about the powers that the Secretary of State would have, so that everyone knows in what cases they would be used. We are delighted with our present Secretary of State, but one cannot judge who will hold that position in 20 or 30 years, so I hope that those powers will be clearly defined, and that we will know the constraints placed on that person.

Another main point of the Bill is that finds that are likely to be treasure must be reported to the coroner within two weeks, which is extremely useful. The maximum penalty for deliberately concealing the finds will be three months imprisonment, or a fine of £5,000, or both. That might sound severe, but it is absolutely right.

We are talking about preserving Britain's heritage. It is important for finds to be reported because there could be additional treasure in the area. I assume that people will know that archaeological experts in universities and museums will be notified of the finds. They might be attracted to the spot to find out whether anything else is there.

I have nothing against people who use metal detectors, but if the find is notified to the coroner and made public, experts who know a little more about the subject matter can become involved and perhaps even supervise more digs in the area to find out whether anything else is to be found. That could enhance the heritage and the archaeological finds in the area. I am pleased, therefore, that that provision has been included in the Bill. The more finds we can discover, the better it will be for everyone.

I am also delighted that the coroner will be able to make reasonable efforts to ensure that occupiers and landowners are informed of any reported find of treasure on their land. That brings me back to the case that my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge mentioned—the electrician who found coins in a loft. Any electricians who want to come to my house are welcome to do so—they would be lucky to find anything.

There are vast tracts of farmland in my constituency, as in many others, and some of the villages there are well known to archaeologists. In Ribchester, for example, if one wants to do anything to one's house, such as adding a porch or a garage, one has to notify the planning department, which notifies archaeologists at the neighbouring university, who have to decide whether they want to do a dig before any building takes place. That shows how problematic the situation is, but that is the right course of action.

It is therefore right that landowners should be informed of reported finds of treasure on their land. We have talked of trespassing, and it would be appalling if someone discovered treasure on someone else's land and was able to make off with it and be given its full value. That is absurd.

Even after the Bill is enacted—as I am sure it will be—we will not be able to rectify the problems caused by the rogue. People will still go on someone's land, find treasure and make off with it, and we will never be able to stop that, but at least we will know what the law is. I am sure that people involved in metal detection will want to ensure that any rogues in their midst are brought to book as quickly as possible, because they give all metal detectorists a bad name. That problem must be sorted out as quickly as possible.

Clause 7 would give the coroner the discretion to summon a jury to a treasure inquest, thus speeding up the process considerably. I believe that it might also reduce the cost of working out whether something is treasure. The Bill also clarifies the coroner's duties, thus making them somewhat easier.

The Bill requires that a code of practice be prepared to deal with rewards, after consultation with interested parties. Will those include metal detectorists and those in the archaeological community? It is right to draw up a code of practice, and the Bill will not become fully operational until that code is known. I hope that a number of associations and interested parties will be consulted.

People will want to know what the rewards are going to be. For example, if metal detectorists find something on someone else's land, they will know that they will get half the value of the find and the landowner will get half, or they might even reach some sort of deal whereby the landowner gets 75 per cent. and the finder 25 per cent.

Mr. Nicholls: That is the point. It is a question of reaching an arrangement. If one cannot come to terms—if the landowner would not allow someone to wander over his land with a metal detector if he does not get a big enough share—a deal will not be done. It would be wrong if no attempt were made to reach a deal, or if someone tried to rat on a deal and hang on to what they had found. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a question of making an arrangement with the owner of the land and adhering to it?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope that the position will become far clearer with the passage of the Bill. I suspect that, because of the publicity that will result from its passage, many more landowners will be far more conscious of what they might have and be keen—one never knows—to invite metal detectorists on to the land to try to find something, but under the arrangement that, if they do find anything, the landowner gets half and the finder gets half. That will become far more transparent.

We have heard about some of the reservations of metal detectorists about the Bill, and I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire made it clear that it is not anti-metal detectorist, but quite the reverse. We often see them operating in our constituencies—I find it slightly bemusing, but there they are, either alone or with the whole family, traipsing over fields and looking hopefully for some find.

[Mr. Evans]

I do not know whether they are lucky every time. I suspect that it is like fishing and one does not catch something every time. I have caught something on only one occasion when I have been out fishing. Metal detectorists probably have to make a massive investment of their time and, even after years, might find little, if anything at all. The Bill might encourage them to go out knowing clearly what is treasure, and the procedures for reporting treasure trove to the coroner and the landowner.

If the legislation leads to more artefacts being found, metal detectorists will be providing us with a great social and historical service, and we should encourage them to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire said that he anticipated greater finds of treasure after the Bill's passage, which should be welcomed.

What about after the treasure has been found? Will museums have the ability to say, "We are very interested in this—it should be put on display so that the nation can enjoy this artifact or treasure"? I am concerned that, if there is a substantial increase in the amount of treasure found, museums may not be able to buy it. I am worried that the treasure will go on to the open market, be bought by someone abroad and lost to this country for ever.

If it is likely that there will be more treasure on the market, museums should be in a position to buy it. I ask the Minister to examine that issue, because I do not want to see the treasure leaving this country. Will museums be able to get funding or assistance from other bodies?

No one else has mentioned the national lottery. If museums were able to get access to some of the substantial sums that have been made available through the successes of the lottery, the country would benefit. I hope that that idea can be examined, although there may obviously be problems with capital and revenue purchases.

I return to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge: that we do not want to see the treasure going into museums and then being locked away. If that were to happen, it might as well have been left in the ground. I hope that museums will be imaginative with the type of treasure and artefacts they obtain. We want to see treasure put into museums as part of the living history of the United Kingdom, to show our youngsters how important history is and how we have developed. If museums can afford to buy the treasure, it will enhance everyone's life.

I have two questions on the Bill. The first is whether it will be a graverobbers charter. From what I can make out—perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire would like to say something if I have it wrong—the current position is that graves are fully protected by law and licences are needed to open them, but gold and silver objects discovered at an unknown burial site might qualify as treasure. I hope that the position will be made absolutely clear. The last thing any hon. Member wants is for people to think that they can start digging away at known and designated cemeteries and burial sites; that would be dreadful.

My second question is whether the Bill will criminalise innocent people who fail to report finds because they did not know that they should have done so. That may always be a problem, but I understand that the Bill specifically states that any person who has a reasonable excuse shall have a defence against a possible prosecution for failing to report treasure. Obviously we need clarity in the system, but also some flexibility. We should ensure that there is understanding for a young person, for example, who is given a metal detection kit for Christmas, starts wandering around and finds something of great value, unbeknownst to him or her, fails to report it and is in breach of the law.

Once this Bill becomes an Act, perhaps metal detection kits should contain the code of practice as part of their packaging. As with electronic products, the instructions should be read before "plugging in". People could read the instructions before they go on to the land, and start to enjoy discovering some of Britain's hidden treasures.

10.53 am

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): I apologise to the House for not being present at the start of the debate, but I have been trying to follow it. I first congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) on introducing the Bill. If it is successful, it will represent the first change to legislation on treasure trove since Richard the Lionheart first ruled that gold or silver that had been hidden with the intention of recovery by the owner belonged to the Crown.

King Richard's original purpose for that legislation was to line the Crown's pockets to make ready for battle. I can understand the Treasury's wish to boost revenue going into the Exchequer by any possible means, but I do not think that that is the reason why the current legislation remains on the statute book. Our currency is no longer gold-based—which some people may regret—and the legislation has now become a means by which we are able to afford at least some protection to our heritage, by ensuring that historic finds can be purchased by the Crown for cataloguing and display.

As some hon. Members have already said, the current law is substantially flawed and riddled with anomalies, with the result that much of our heritage is being lost as more and more relics are dug out and kept or sold without first being reported. That is happening, in part, because of the actions of unscrupulous individuals, but also quite frequently because people do not understand or are not aware of the current law.

We are exceptionally fortunate in this country because of the wealth of history and antiquity that forms our heritage, but much is still not known. The existing records and objects of the past have been studied and analysed, and they may still have some new surprises to bring forward, although it is much less likely now. To find out more about our history, we will have to depend on new discoveries, and the vast majority of those are likely to be found buried in the ground.

Some objects, when discovered, will immediately tell us more about their provenance and about our history. They may come from a certain period or have a marking on them that indicates their age, but many more will be something of a mystery. Crucial in interpreting the significance of those objects will be the location in which they were buried and their depth in the ground. Anyone who has been on an archaeological dig will know of the painstaking, enormously slow process that is involved in

uncovering objects. The precise position in the ground of every revealed object and its proximity to other finds is carefully recorded.

When people come along who are not experts or who are not necessarily interested in the history of an object, but whose main motivation is simply to try to uncover a pot of gold, and they root around without paying much attention to the archaeological importance of their finds, the archaeological information is lost. All too often, they simply chuck aside anything that does not immediately appear to have a monetary value.

In recent years, there have been a number of attempts to change the law to deal with that problem. In particular, an enormous amount of work was done by the Earl of Perth in 1994, and by Lord Abinger in 1981. I can understand the frustration they must have felt, having devoted so much effort to updating the law, only to find that their efforts were unsuccessful, not because of opposition in either House but because of a lack of parliamentary time. I hope that they will feel that the work they undertook was not wasted, because it is of immense value today as we debate this bill.

As has already been said, the law currently covers only gold and silver objects that can be proved to have been stored for safekeeping and subsequently not recovered, and it does not necessarily take into account their historic worth. There is no proper penalty in law for those who do not report finds of treasure trove to the relevant authority, and landowners have no rights over those who make finds on their land. The Bill will deal with the inadequacies of existing legislation in three ways.

First, as we have heard, the Bill will apply to all objects which are found to contain at least 5 per cent.—or less for hoards of more than 10 coins—by weight of gold or silver, and which are at least 300 years old. Any items found in the same hoard will also be covered, regardless of the material from which they are made. For example, the pottery container holding the coins may often be of greater historical significance than the coins themselves, and it should, of course, be afforded the same protection in law.

Secondly, the need to prove that objects have been stored rather than lost is to be removed. Hoarding through burial was in times past a common event—anyone who has dipped into Samuel Pepys's diary will know that he and his father were unable to recover all their hoarded coins from the garden, because the coins had been dispersed in the soil—but it is often almost impossible to prove that objects have been stored rather than lost unless the find is too large to have been accidentally lost by the former owner.

Museums should have the opportunity to acquire any find considered to be historically important, regardless of how it came to be buried. It is the absence of legislation such as this that has allowed much of our heritage to pass into the hands of private collectors, many from abroad, without our museums having the opportunity to examine or catalogue the objects prior to their sale. Of course, that is not the case in Scotland, where all objects whose original owners cannot be traced are the property of the Crown, not the finder or landowner.

Furthermore, I understand that the Bill does not mean that our museums will suddenly be cluttered with all sorts of undesired objects. Finds will be passed to museums only if the museums wish to acquire them for their collection, and if they have the necessary funds to make the purchase at a market price. I am advised that no central fund for the acquisition of such articles will be established, and, should a museum not be interested in securing the article, or should the funds not be available, the item will be returned to the finder.

Thirdly, the Bill introduces for the first time a requirement that anyone who finds what he suspects to be treasure must report the find within 14 days. I understand that that is already the position in Northern Ireland. Failure to notify the authorities within that period will become a criminal offence. Thus, for the first time since the middle ages, the law on treasure trove will have teeth.

I understand that the Bill has received great support from the police, magistrates, coroners, landowners, councils, museums and archaeological societies, but I am aware that there is still some opposition to it, mainly from metal detectorists. I believe that many of the people who pursue metal detecting as a hobby are honourable people who wish to behave responsibly. Indeed, many of them make a valuable contribution by uncovering items that would not otherwise have been found.

The code of conduct laid down by the National Council for Metal Detecting is exemplary. It states that those who pursue metal detecting should not trespass, should ask permission before venturing on to private land, should report unusual historic finds, and should be aware of the law relating to archaeology. Such provisions are very welcome, but the difficulty has been that they have not always been followed by less scrupulous people. That is something that the Bill will at last deal with.

One or two other concerns have been expressed, and it would be wrong of me not to mention my constituent, Mr. Fearnley of Maldon, who wrote to me this week outlining his worries about the Bill. He suggests that the Bill would deprive landowners of what is at present their property. My understanding is that that is not entirely correct, that the Bill in fact respects the right of property and has, as a result, attracted the support of the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is touching on an important point, which has especially concerned me. Does he agree that the assumption should be that the landowner rather than the finder should receive any reward, especially if the finder was not on the land with the owner's permission? Does he accept that it would be very welcome if the Bill made that very clear?

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree. I think thet it is because the Bill covers that point that it has attracted the support of organisations such as the Country Landowners Association.

Although I welcome the Bill and the provisions that will clarify and extend existing protection considerably, I believe that there is a need to go still further. The Bill refers only to treasure, and treasure is very strictly defined. It must have at least some gold or silver content, and the Bill will clearly be a major improvement in respect of the protection of such items, but there is a need for a much more wide-ranging measure to cover all portable antiquities.

Some protection already exists in legislation covering ancient sites and monuments, but not all ancient sites and monuments have yet been discovered. By the time we

[Mr. Whittingdale]

have agreed that something is an ancient site that should be afforded protection, we may be too late and many of the artefacts there may have been lost. I hope that, in due course, we shall re-examine the law in this respect.

This issue is one in which I take a particular interest, like my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire, and, indeed, the Minister, who is a close neighbour of mine. We represent areas rich in history. Maldon is, of course, famous as the site of one of the first battles, just over 1,000 years ago, but finds in my constituency go much further back. Recently, there has been a major discovery at Elms Farm of an iron age settlement that is around 2,000 years old.

English Heritage has given a grant of £1 million for the excavation of the site—the biggest grant that it has ever awarded. There has already been an enormous wealth of discoveries which have told us much about iron age Britain and, subsequently, about Roman Britain, because the Romans settled there later. About 20,000 artefacts have been uncovered, but the vast majority—indeed, practically all—are not made of gold or silver but of wood, pottery or stone. Unless one is fortunate enough to discover gold or silver objects, and thus be covered by the Bill, finds are still not adequately protected.

Only a few months ago, there was a find at the other end of my constituency of one of the biggest early Roman settlements. I understand that it is one of the very few places that Claudius visited when he came to this country. A temple and theatre have been uncovered there.

That site needs protection, and I hope that there may come a time when we can consider how best to protect our archaeological heritage, so that all artefacts that may have some significance are saved and it is not possible for those people who simply want to make a quick buck by uncovering some gold to trample all over such a site, do irreparable damage and destroy much of what could have been of enormous value in our attempt to uncover our history.

The Bill will extend existing protection, and will be enormously valuable in protecting some of our heritage. In due course, I hope that we can go further still and re-examine ways in which we can best protect that heritage and learn more about it for our children and grandchildren.

11.8 am

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this interesting debate and to explain why the Labour party is happy to support the reasonable and constructive Bill introduced by the hon. Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant). I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the several people whose work has preceded the debate and the Bill's formation, particularly Lord Perth. I also join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to Dr. Roger Bland, without whose expert guidance and notes I suspect we should all be a lot less well informed than we are today.

As many hon. Members have said in the debate, the existing law dates back to 1195 and was introduced for totally different reasons. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the law in respect of treasure is in a chaotic and illogical state. Many people feel that it is the worst and weakest framework in Europe—perhaps with the exception of the system in Belgium. If someone is digging in his garden, it matters in law whether that garden is in Scotland, or England or Wales. If someone discovers something, he owns it as long as it is not gold or silver. He need not tell anybody about it or bring it to a scholar's attention. He can put it on his mantelpiece, shove it in his garage, break it up and dispose of it although it may be of enormous archaeological, historic and cultural significance.

At present, there is no requirement for that person to respect the importance of his find or to do anything with it, which cannot be right. Equally, if the find contains gold, the position changes, which is illogical. The hon. Gentleman's Bill sensibly clarifies and reforms crucial elements of legislation.

I particularly welcome the clarification on the issue of intentionality. It is clearly impossible to say what somebody was intending 2,000 or 3,000 years ago. The intention is sometimes clear—for example, if the find is discovered in a burial chamber, where it was likely to have been recovered at a later date. But it is often impossible to judge intent: the intentions are buried underground—buried in time. It is impossible for us to detect the intent; it is unfair to ask a coroner's jury—of all the unlikely sets of men and women—to try, retrospectively, to judge the intent.

As a result of such difficulties, there have been idiotic cases such as that involving the Middleham jewel—the late 15th-century reliquary which was found in a Yorkshire field in 1986. The jury could not decide on the intent, so the find was not covered by treasure trove and was sold at Sotheby's for £1.43 million. The case was brought to a happy conclusion in terms of our cultural heritage only because the Yorkshire museum was able to acquire the find—all credit to it for doing so.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's point about clarifying the precious metal content. In 1990, an amazing iron age hoard was found at Snettisham, but because it was a mixture of torcs, bracelets, ingots, coins and scrap metal—which had no huge value, but was important architecturally—it was not covered by treasure trove. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the important find at Hoxne which, because it included tableware, was in a different category.

Mr. Nicholls: Is there not a problem because, even under the present excellent Bill, a hoard that is immensely important in terms of our national heritage, will be beyond protection if it does not include the appropriate silver and gold content? Is that not the sort of issue that might be clarified in Committee?

Mr. Fisher: I am sure that the subject will be discussed in Committee, although we have had an interesting near-Committee-stage debate today, with observant points being raised by Conservative Members. The issue needs to be clarified, although I suspect that some aspects will be covered by the Government's forthcoming code of practice.

I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for South-West Cambridgeshire recognises the problem of hoards that do not have gold content. Many hon. Members will remember the long saga of the Icklingham bronzes of Mr. Browning in Suffolk throughout the 1980s—the

bronzes were stolen and eventually appeared in New York. Unfortunately, they were not covered by treasure trove because they were bronze, although they were important Roman bronzes.

The Bill's scope is important; reference has been made to the excellent work of the treasure trove reviewing committee and its very good annual report. An enormous range of finds come under the treasure trove, including bronze-age torcs found in interesting circumstances when erecting a farm fence. A set of bronze age bracelets were found by two women called Mrs. Beatrice and Mrs. Ferguson while they were gardening—an interesting way of enlivening a Saturday afternoon's gardening.

I commend the interesting report to hon. Members; it mentions an extraordinary scattering of Roman coins all over the country. Silver denarii, radiates and brass sestertii have been found all over—in Suffolk, Gwynedd, Manchester, Leicestershire, Essex, Dorset, Lincolnshire, river banks, woods, moors, marshes and fields. Clearly, the Romans were careless about spreading gold and silver over their realm. The report is an amazing piece of work by the treasure trove reviewing committee: it shows how important the subject is; why we should improve the law and why the hon. Gentleman should be commended on introducing this sensible and constructive measure.

Hon. Members recognise that there has to be reform, but the question is: what sort? In his interesting contribution, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) took what can best be described as the small "c" conservative approach. He seemed to say, "It is working quite well, so we should leave well alone." We have not heard quite so much this morning from the libertarian wing about repealing all laws and leaving it to the finder-takes-all principle. I was surprised by that, but I wondered whether the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) might be beginning to take that approach.

It would be an extremely dangerous approach to adopt, which would focus attention on the Sutton Hoo burial ship, which was not treasure trove. If we had a policy of finder takes all, the Sutton Hoo find could have been—were it not for the extreme responsibility of the woman involved—kept in a garage, broken up or sold off. Anything could have happened to something that was perhaps the most important Anglo-Saxon find of our generation.

The reformist wing includes the extreme radical position of those who believe that all the current measures should be scrapped because they are not working and we should introduce a new, comprehensive piece of legislation. That was the position adopted by the Museums Association at its 1994 conference. The approach was articulately and intelligently argued by Mr. Tim Schadla-Hall, the museums director in Leicestershire. It is a coherent approach which, to some extent, the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon seemed to adopt; it can be intellectually justified.

It is arguable whether any Government would have the time and the ability to get it right from the outset. It is an intellectually respectable, interesting and logical position, but it would be difficult to get such a law right. When other countries such as Turkey and Italy have introduced such legislation, they have encountered enormous problems in enforcing it. Many people feel that, because such legislation is unenforceable, it drives more of the stuff underground in those countries. Therefore, although the policy is logical, there are genuine problems with it—but I do not dismiss it.

The hon. Member for South-West Cambridgeshire has taken a sensible, pragmatic, reformist position. He has recognised the cultural public interest and balanced it against private interest. Crucially, he realises that the measure needs to be workable and enforceable, and needs to balance criminality against good practice. I was a little surprised and confused by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) who, in an interesting contribution, at one stage seemed to say that we should criminalise the fellows committing such action, but then to say that it would be terrible to criminalise them. I was a little confused about his position on criminality in relation to some of the issues, but his contribution was interesting.

The Bill should command general support on both sides of the House—it has support outside the House. The Labour party wants to associate itself very strongly with this position. The Bill is not hostile to metal detectorists. Indeed, the National Art Collection Fund's 1994 report paid tribute to the work of metal detectorists and said that 10 times as many important brooches have been found since 1988 because of such work than had been found before then—but it did not quite say that that period saw the rise of the metal detector in this area, the new technology working for archaeology.

Most metal detectorists are extremely responsible people and do it not out of gain but out of genuine interest. The Bill does not threaten them in any way whatsoever. The annual report of the treasure trove reviewing committee states that all but five of the 27 cases reviewed by it in 1994-95 were found by metal detectorists. It is recognised that most metal detectorists play an important role. The National Metal Detecting Association is only too aware that this debate was provoked because of the looting of Wanborough, and that, if it had not occurred, we would not be where we are today. That was an irresponsible, and damaging act—Celtic coins were looted. Not all people who work in this area act with good sense or with a constructive attitude.

I look forward to the Minister's speech. I hope that the Government will endorse the Bill.I hope that he will tell us a little bit more about the code of practice, which I understand is forthcoming. Will he tell us when the code of practice is likely to be put into effect and what areas it will cover? For example, will it cover guidelines on registration of a wider range of portable antiques or the obligation to report all finds? Will the code of practice go so far as to license all excavations, as occurs in Northern Ireland? Will the state have the right to claim any find of archaeological importance, as occurs in Scotland? Will the Minister, under a code of practice, encourage a network of designated museums and centres for reporting finds? We already have a network in Leicestershire, Norfolk and the museum of London. If that were extended, it would be helpful and constructive, and fit very well with the hon. Gentleman's Bill.

I hope that the Minister will also say something about the problems of enforcement. How will the Government react to that? How will they encourage people to act responsibly? Counties such as Norfolk issue leaflets, and there is clear and public guidance to people on how to react when they discover a find. That sort of constructive attitude, if supported by a voluntary code that the Government introduce, would be welcomed by the Labour party.

[Mr. Fisher]

Will the Minister also put it into a slightly wider context and say something about the international context and whether, if ever, the Government will ratify the 1970 UNESCO treaty to put an international context on all this work? I hope that the Government publish a good code of practice as a codicil almost to the Bill. The Labour party congratulates the hon. Gentleman on his Bill, and hopes that it gets speedy passage through Committee.

11.23 am

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) for bringing forward the Bill. He has done a tremendous amount of hard work—he has dug up detailed, esoteric and recondite work and presented it to us. I expect that he will have a hard and detailed time in the Committee stage. There has been a long, and not always satisfactory, history to this measure. A number of hon. Members have paid tribute to the work—which was frustrated—that was done in another place during previous attempts to get provisions of this nature turned into an Act. While it was frustrating at the time for noble Lords, their hard work has helped my hon. Friend prepare the Bill and it will shortly see fruition in an Act.

Secondly, I shall refer briefly to some of the comments that have been raised by my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), who spoke for the Opposition. Thirdly, I shall say something about the Government's position and take up the words of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central and put it in a wider context so that, on Report, we will have in our minds the Government's discussion document on portable antiquities, the treasure trove reports and the consultations which will take place about the guidance that will fill in any detailed aspects of the Act.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire will want to comment in more detail, as this is his Bill. He made an extremely thoughtful contribution. There are a number of sides to this Bill: the interests of the finders, the interests of the landowners and the interests of the nation—which can be subdivided into museums, individuals and individual displays where the public may see the objects that were discovered. The objects should be recorded and their provenance should be ascertained and set down for future generations so that they know the importance of them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said that it was right that not everything should necessarily go into museums when they are discovered, and it is the Government's intention that not everything should go into museums. As my hon. Friend's Bill makes clear, there will be times when museums are offered objects but do not want them. They will then be returned to the finder, who can do with them as he or she wishes. My hon. Friend also said that he did not want objects mouldering in the cellars of museums and never seen by the general public. However, he also said that museums have changed in the last few years.

Hon. Members will know that I am currently looking at a museums review, which the Government have not held since 1928. What my hon. Friend's Bill says about treasure and the consequences of the consultation document on portable antiquities will be fitted in with what we are hoping to do about museums. It will be put into a wide context.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge referred to the difficulties of defining when an object is found in association and when it is not. He asked whether an object found near where others were previously found—perhaps a field away—will be associated with the previous objects. These matters will be discussed in Committee, and they will be the subject of consultation. There are doubts and uncertainties about these matters. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central asked me to say something about a code of practice. We will ask the detectorists, the police, the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union and landowners for their representations and about exactly how they think such matters should be best decided.

My hon. Friends the Members for Teignbridge and for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale)—or perhaps I should say the battle of Maldon—made an important point about striking a balance between the rights of the detectorist or the finder and those of the landowner. It is a difficult one to strike. A problem arises under natural justice. If someone is trespassing on someone else's land and finds something on it, does it not belong to the person who owns that land, even if he never knew of the find's existence and never knew that he owned it? Those are difficult questions and we must direct our minds to their solution. We shall do so in the guidance.

I support what my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, the Opposition spokesman, and my hon. Friends have said about the Bill not being directed against detectorists. It should help the responsible detectorist. My wife is quite obsessive about detectors and I have more piles of rusty nails and old horseshoes than any man would wish to shake a stick at, but I certainly do not want to see her obsession in any way calmed down—within reason, at any rate. Let me add the Government's assurance that the Bill is not anti-detectorist. As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central has said, the increase in the number of important finds in the past few years is in large measure due to detectorists. We should encourage responsible detectorists, and the Bill will do so.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my hon. Friend clarify one point? If an item of what used to be termed treasure trove is found on land, who will be able to claim compensation for it under the Bill? How will that be decided? I am sorry to be obtuse, but I simply do not understand it.

Mr. Sproat: I do not think that my hon. Friend is obtuse at all. One cannot be obtuse about something which is not set down clearly. The matter has not been set down clearly in the Bill because it will be considered in the code of practice and the guidance. The matter will be clarified thereby; it is not intended to clarify it in the Bill, only to indicate that it will be clarified.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) courteously apologised to the House for his absence now. He had a previous engagement arranged for later this morning, but he was keen to take part in the debate. I am sure that we are all glad that he did so. I welcome his welcome of the Bill and the fact that he agrees that we

must not discourage responsible detectorists. In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge, he asked how the Secretary of State's powers will be decided. I repeat that that will be a matter for us to consult fully on when the Bill has passed through the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dover also made an interesting point, to which no doubt we shall return in Committee, about whether a fine of £5,000 is too small. Common sense tells us that, if a man reckons he has his paws on £100,000-worth of Roman coins, he will not care very much about a fine of £5,000 or even a possible prison sentence of three months. We shall want to reconsider that matter and the necessity or otherwise of index-linking the value of the fine in later years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) made an extremely interesting speech, in which he also referred to the Secretary of State's powers. I have already said that the extent of those powers will be a matter for consultation, but of equal interest to the House is that what the guidance then determines should be the way in which the Secretary of State behaves will be subject to affirmative resolution in the House. We shall therefore have a chance to return to that matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge also asked what might happen about any changes that are necessary. It is rather like the discussion about television sports rights and what is or is not a listed event. Similarly, decisions will have to be made on what is or is not treasure. If it appears to us that things have been left out which ought to have been put in, the Secretary of State will consider the matter and proposals will be put before the House and will be subject to affirmative resolution. We are not just building flexibility into the Bill, but building into it a flexibility about which the House will have the chance to say, "Yes, we agree," or "No, we do not agree." That element of choice should be included in the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley and others expressed concern about a graverobber's charter and about whether the Bill will criminalise innocent finders. Those are extremely important points and I should like to make it clear to the House that there is no question whatsoever of detectorists being able to break into graves to inspect them. Graves are protected by other laws and they will remain so protected. I can give a total guarantee that the concerns that my hon. Friends have rightly expressed have been taken care of.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley expressed natural concern that we must not criminalise innocent finders. That is so and why the Bill provides that if a discoverer has a reasonable excuse, it will be taken properly into account. For example, someone may dig a trench and happen to find a torc lying there. He may not realise what it is, put it aside and forget about it. Given that that person was just digging a trench and not looking for antiquities, he would have the type of reasonable excuse that would prevent him from being challenged for not reporting the find under the Bill. I am sure that the House may want to return to that in Committee, but I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire has dealt with the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley suggested that detector kits should include a short statement on people's responsibilities when they find something. That was an extremely good idea and a good example of how such debates raise points about which no one had thought. Certainly I had never thought about that and I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire had thought about it, either. No doubt manufacturers will want to take account of my hon. Friend's very good suggestion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon spoke about the hard work done in the Lords. It is worth while to emphasise how grateful we are for that. I hope that their frustrations are now sublimated in the warmth they feel now that their hard work is about to produce something that looks as though it will get through the House. My hon. Friend also raised the important point of considering the Bill in the widest possible context, and I will come to that when I express the more general Government attitude to the Bill.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central gave a general welcome to the Bill, and we very much welcome that. I am always impressed by the amount of extremely arcane information that he has to hand. He quoted that a find worth £1.43 million had been sold at Sotheby's. I do not know how he finds all that information, let alone remembers it. It is nice to have his support.

The hon. Member spoke about the illogicality of the Coroners Act 1988 and the fact that it related only to gold and silver. Not only that, but following a ruling from that splendid lawyer, Lord Denning, the Act relates to a "substantial" amount of gold and silver. When we are considering matters of law, we should always be careful about trying to pin down provisions to such and such a per cent. The exercise of common sense and judgment is something that lawyers should never subtract from their ability to shine upon any particular problem. However, possibly in this case saying that finds relate to 5 per cent. of gold or 5 per cent. of silver makes matters clearer.

I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his invention of the word "intentionality". I am not sure that I do congratulate him on that, but perhaps I should say I congratulate him on his ingenuiality on thinking up such a word. It is ridiculous to expect a coroner's court in 1996 to be able to say whether Ethelred the Unready meant to put a pot with 10 gold coins in the earth.

I thank the hon. Gentleman greatly for his general welcome of the Bill. I will cover in more tedious detail, starting right now, some of the points that he made about what other European countries do or do not do.

The Government very much welcome the Bill. It is a much-needed piece of legislation and I was greatly encouraged to hear the general support it received from all sides of the House. I noted, too, the particular welcome the Bill received from the Opposition. I hope that that means that it will have an easy passage in the sense of well wishing, but perhaps not quite such an easy passage. There are many details which I am sure the House will quite properly wish to look at more closely.

My Department has had responsibility for treasure trove for nearly three years and has been able to place it firmly within its overall responsibilities for archaeological and cultural property. We have made extra resources available for that responsibility, and the Department certainly accepts the need to reform this antiquated law.

If someone finds an object of gold or silver, he should report it to a coroner who will then decide whether to hold a treasure inquest. The coroner will take expert advice, usually from the British museum or the National museums

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and galleries of Wales or the Ulster museum. If it is declared treasure trove, the find is the property of the Crown. In practice, this means that a museum has a right to acquire it, but the finder is rewarded with its full market value. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon will be especially keen to hear that. He will know that in other countries in Europe, to which sometimes he has a slightly ambivalent attitude, do not always give full market value. However, under the Bill we shall continue to do so.

On average, about 25 finds a year are declared treasure trove, 90 per cent. of these being coin hoards, although there are also occasional finds of prehistoric gold torcs and Roman and mediaeval jewellery or plate. During the year April 1994 to April 1995, there were 27 cases of treasure trove. Of those, 25 were coin hoards, the other two being finds of gold torcs, and 16 of the finds were acquired by museums intact. In another five cases, all coin hoards, museums acquired a selection of coins, while in another six cases, once again all coin hoards, the complete finds were returned to their finders. Those statistics, tedious as they may seem, demonstrate to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley that sometimes museums get them and sometimes they do not. There is proper machinery to judge exactly what should be done

In 1977 the treasure trove reviewing committee was set up with the responsibility of advising the Secretary of State on valuations. The committee was established to provide independent scrutiny of treasure trove valuations and it currently contains four members drawn from universities, the trade and collectors. The committee's current terms of reference are

"to determine valuations for items brought before it which correspond as closely as possible, taking account of all the relevant factors, to what might be paid for the object(s) in a sale on the open market between a willing seller and a willing buyer; and to submit an annual report to Treasury ministers".

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central has already expressed his admiration for those reports and I concur with him.

Two changes have recently been made to the committee's procedures to instil the greatest possible public confidence in its working. First, finders are invited to submit valuation evidence of their own—they can thus commission their own valuations from experts—and secondly, the committee has established a panel of expert advisers drawn from the trade to whom it can turn in cases of difficulty.

We are in full agreement with the committee, the British museum and the National museums and galleries of Wales that the best way to encourage finders to report their finds is to ensure that the committee's valuations should not only reflect the market value of the finds in question but should be seen to do so.

A recent valuation case demonstrates how we aim to achieve that. In September 1993 the great find of Roman gold and silver coins and other objects from Hoxne in Suffolk was declared treasure trove and in the following November the committee agreed a total valuation of £1.75 million for it. The British museum's valuation report was some 50 pages long and the committee also obtained three independent valuations, which were all within 7 per cent. of each other.

There was some initial criticism of the valuation in the metal-detecting press. One tabloid newspaper put a £10 million price tag on the find before it was known what it contained, thus raising expectations unreasonably high. To allay those criticisms and to promote open government, the valuation papers were released publicly and they have received favourable comment in coin collecting and metal detecting magazines. We think that this method of determining the amount of rewards works very well, and it is not our intention to change it should the Bill be successful.

The Government believe that the treasure trove system performs a vital service in safeguarding for the nation some of the most significant finds from the soil of England and Wales, but the law is limited in scope in an irrational way. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire has said, it relates only to objects with a substantial gold or silver content, reflecting its origins as a means of raising revenue for the Crown, rather than of preserving the most important archaeological finds for the nation. The objects are treasure trove only if the jury decides that they were probably buried with the intention of later recovery—a fact which may be virtually impossible to decide after 2,000 years or more.

Clearly, the current law cannot protect our archaeological heritage to the extent that we would like, and we support this effort to introduce a more appropriate system.

One of the most curious features of treasure trove is that the English law does not apply to the whole of the United Kingdom. I do not know why my brief states that that is curious, because the same pertains in hundreds of other matters. In Scotland, all newly discovered archaeological objects, irrespective of whether they are precious metal or regardless of whether they were hidden or lost, belong to the Crown under the legal principle of bona vacantia. I pronounce it slightly differently from my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire, who I am sure got it right.

Although the Crown chooses to exercise its claim only in certain cases, this means that in Scotland all archaeological objects must be reported, and the Crown can claim those which it believes to be sufficiently important. The system works well and enjoys general acceptance.

Northern Ireland has the same treasure trove law as England and Wales, which is why it is included within the scope of the Bill, but there is also has a statutory duty to report all archaeological objects in the Province, and the Northern Irish law also states that one needs a licence to search for archaeological objects with a metal detector.

In the Republic of Ireland, for example, a law was passed in 1993 which made all archaeological objects the property of the state. It is an offence to own or trade in archaeological objects from the soil of the Republic and the law contained retrospective provisions requiring all privately owned antiquities found in the Republic to be reported within three months of the enactment of the law. Metal detecting is outlawed and metal detecting magazines are banned. Those measures might seem draconian to us, and they are certainly a long way from the Bill's proposals, but they enjoy widespread support in the Republic, where it is thought to be entirely right that the nation's archaeological heritage should be protected in this way.

Hon. Members have mentioned what happens in other countries, and it is interesting to know the geographical and historical background to the legislation. A survey of legislation in 17 other European countries shows that the legal protection afforded to portable antiquities in England and Wales is more limited in scope, more permissive and also more liberal in its treatment of finders than in virtually any other country in Europe. Only Belgium, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central said, has a weaker legal requirement to report finds and provides legal protection to a smaller range of objects than England and Wales.

In most countries, all archaeological excavation is controlled and metal detectors can be used only under licence, and those are not normally given to treasure hunters, the only exceptions being the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium and some of the Scandinavian countries. We have no controls on the use of metal detectors in this country—except on scheduled sites—and the Bill contains no restrictions on their use.

Lastly, as regards rewards, the practice in England and Wales of paying the finder the full market value as assessed by an independent committee, is more liberal than in most countries, in many of which the reward bears little relation to the market value. All these countries have passed laws to protect their heritage of moveable archaeological objects this century. They see that as a completely natural and proper thing to do.

When viewed against that background, the Bill will make only a modest change to our current law. It will make only a very minor adjustment to the current requirement to report finds; it will extend the rights of the Crown only in a very modest way; it will not impose any restrictions on the use of metal detectors, and it will not change the practice of paying rewards assessed at the full market value.

The Government view treasure trove reform, important though it is, as just one part of the problem. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire said, the great majority of archaeological objects will still fall outside the scope of the Bill. A recent survey undertaken by the Council for British Archaeology on behalf of English Heritage has estimated that, every year in England and Wales, as many as 400,000 objects of archaeological interest are discovered. That is in addition to finds discovered during professional archaeological investigations. Such finds include not only coins and other metal objects, but fragments of pottery and other artefacts. Occasionally, those finds—known as "portable antiquities"—may have great monetary value, but, on the whole, their importance lies principally in their archaeological interest.

The Government believe that it is important to distinguish between the two aspects of the problem: the public acquisition of finds and the recording of them. Treasure trove provides a mechanism whereby the national and local museums have, in effect, the right of first refusal to certain finds, providing that they can find the money to pay full rewards for them to the finders.

On the subject of recording, there is widespread agreement that the reporting of finds, so that they can be properly recorded, is of key importance, more important often than public acquisition, but the Bill will make only limited adjustments to the classes of objects that are legally required to be reported—for example, hoards of base-metal coins—and there would continue to be no legal requirement to report other important categories of finds.

For that reason, last month, my Department published—the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central properly asked me about this—a discussion document on portable antiquities. It seeks views on possible measures to improve the recording of all archaeological objects, not just those covered by treasure trove law or its proposed replacement, in the belief that current arrangements are, except in one or two sectors, not working well.

The Government accept that there is an urgent need for action to record those objects as they are irreplaceable and of great importance for the nation's heritage. The discussion document considers the relative merits of voluntary and compulsory systems for the recording of finds. Under a voluntary system, the Government would draw up, in consultation with representatives of museums, archaeological organisations and metal detectorists, a voluntary code of practice for the recording of archaeological objects found in England and Wales. We believe that, if it is to be effective, the code would need to be accompanied by a campaign of education to encourage finders to report their finds.

One of the advantages of such an approach is that it would not require primary legislation and, thus, providing general agreement for it can be obtained, it could be introduced with minimum delay. There is evidence that a voluntary code of practice is the option most likely to receive the widest support. In the Government's view, in their way, those proposals are as important as my hon. Friend's Bill.

I would like to stress that the Bill places no restrictions on the use of metal detectors and the Government have repeatedly stressed that any detectorist behaving in a law-abiding manner will have nothing to fear if the Bill becomes law. I think that all hon. Members have said that is the wish. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear me repeat the assurance that he asked for recently given by my noble Friend Lord Inglewood in his foreword to the report of the treasure trove reviewing committee for 1994-95. Neither the Government nor the European Union has any plans to ban or otherwise restrict responsible metal detecting.

In that same foreword, my noble Friend noted that all but five of the 27 cases of treasure trove recorded in the report were found with the use of metal detectors and he congratulated all those finders who reported their finds promptly to the proper authorities. The report for the first time named the finders. Without their ready co-operation, a great deal of valuable information about our nation's past would be lost. The Government willingly acknowledge that, in recent years, metal detectorists have discovered many objects of great importance for the nation's heritage.

My hon. Friend has described the meetings that officials from my Department have had with the National Council for Metal Detecting to discuss the Bill. He has made a generous offer that he will discuss at any time or place, within reason, any point that it wants to make. I hope that we will have the benefit of that discussion in Committee so that no one will say afterwards that they did have a chance to say what they believed.

The Government view the Bill as a modest measure to extend the protection currently afforded to certain finds of gold and silver coins and objects to a slightly wider

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range of archaeological finds, and to iron out some of the anomalies of this mediaeval law. We are not aware of any reasoned case for the retention of the law of treasure trove, and none has been suggested during the discussions that have taken place on the Bill with the many organisations that have an interest in it, including the National Council for Metal Detecting—although we are still in discussion with it—and landowners. Under current law, it is necessary to prove the motive of an individual. As hon. Members have said, it is unreasonable to expect a coroners jury to decide that in every circumstance.

The Bill's main aim, therefore, is to clarify exactly what type of find should be reported and will be treasure. At present, that is unclear; my hon. Friend's Bill makes it clearer. The Bill strikes a fair compromise between the interests of finders and landowners, but we shall consider that further in the consultation paper.

Detailed guidelines on how the Secretary of State for National Heritage is to pay rewards will be set out in the code of practice provided in clause ll. That code will be drawn up in consultation with interested parties. As a further safeguard, the code will have to approved by each House of Parliament before the Bill can take effect. As I have made clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley, the Bill will not allow people to look for treasure in graves. Innocent finders will also be protected.

At the same time, the Bill has great flexibility because it contains a provision that gives the Secretary of State the power to add or to remove categories of object from the Bill. I hope that we are building in fairness, flexibility and an opportunity for the House to return to the matter. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Cambridgeshire again, and I look forward to the consideration of the Bill in Committee.

11.55 pm

Sir Anthony Grant: With the leave of the House, I will make a brief response because my hon. Friend the Minister has dealt with nearly everything that had been asked about. I am grateful for the support from both Front Benches and to all hon. Members who have spoken because they have all made sensible and helpful speeches, all of which will be extremely helpful in Committee. Nearly all the points have, I believe, been matters of detail and I assure my hon. Friends that I shall take them carefully on board.

Because of the warm response to the Bill, I hope that it will have a speedy journey through the labyrinth of procedure and will reach the statute book in the not too distant future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) rightly asked about what the definition of a hoard is and about how scattered it would have to be. We shall have to satisfy him about that in or before the Committee. He dealt with ownership. I emphasise again that the Bill is a change in the law. For the first time, landowners—whom he was concerned about—will have certain rights. Again, we shall consider whether they are adequate.

We should not forget someone else: the owner. My hon. Friend feared an electrician coming to his house and finding something of benefit. If my hon. Friend had a predecessor in title who said, "Hey, just a minute—all those coins are mine: I left them by mistake when I sold the house," his claim as the true owner, which he could prove, is established. That is covered by clause 4. The problem is that, in most cases, the original owners lived possibly 1,000 or 2,000 years ago.

Mr. Nicholls: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for pressing him on this point. I do not understand how a code of practice or guidance can clarify what seems to be a fundamental point. It would have to be sorted out by statute. Where there is no predecessor in title, in the sense that the possibility is remote, it is wrong that a finder should have rights over and above the owner of the property in which that hoard was found. That should be clarified. It is a policy decision about whether the finder or property owner should have the right. I do not understand how such a fundamental point can be dealt with in guidance.

Sir Anthony Grant: We will consider that matter carefully, but four factors are involved: first, the original owner, who can usually rarely traced in these cases; secondly, the rights of the finder; thirdly, the rights of the landowner or occupier; and fourthly, the rights of the nation. All those must be reconciled. To some extent, my Bill provides the framework for getting this right for the first time. The law has not been satisfactory for a long time. We shall consider closely what my hon. Friend says.

My hon. Friends the Members for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), and my hon. Friend the Minister referred to the enforcement provisions. I was rather surprised because I had feared that someone would say that we were being too draconian. It seems as though we are being too lenient and wishy-washy. We will look at that point. However, I advise my hon. Friends that the issue of penalties gets entangled in Home Office regulations and standards, and in comparisons with other provisions.

Many years ago, I introduced a Bill on oil in navigable waters. We had a great struggle with the Home Office to get what we thought was an enormous penalty for people who discharged oil in navigable waters. We then discovered that it was totally inadequate and we trebled the fine. We shall have to see how we get on here; I was interested that people were concerned about the fines.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley that there will be no question of being ferocious or savage towards people who have genuine reasons for not reporting a find. Clearly, our famous word in law, "reasonable", can be interpreted perfectly reasonably in such a case.

I am so glad that every hon. Member who has spoken has emphasised, as I sought to do, that the Bill is not an attack on the excellent activity of metal detecting. I point out the concessions that we have made to the national council since Lord Perth's Bill was considered in the House of Lords. I mention four items that the council raised on which we have made concessions. One is the number of coins with a precious metal content of less than 5 per cent.; we have raised the figure to 10 under clause 1.

The Crown will now have the power to disclaim objects that have been submitted as potential treasure under clause 6; that change is in response to the national council's request. Coroners will now have discretion on whether to summon a jury to a treasure inquest under

clause 7. Coroners—this was the final request that the council raised—will now be required to inform finders if a treasure inquest is to be held and to ensure that they are given the opportunity to examine witnesses under clause 9.

All four concessions were made at the request of the national council and are changes made since the introduction of Lord Perth's Bill. It therefore cannot be said that we have been unreasonable in the way in which we have responded. If the council wants to make any other points, it has only to let us know. If the council lets me know, I shall meet members of it. If the requests are sensible and reasonable, we shall accommodate them in Committee.

I repeat that responsible metal detectorists have a great contribution to make in the future recovery of our heritage. In that spirit and because of the warm support given by the House to the Bill, I can say that this is a moment of history. If the House gives a Second Reading to the Bill, it will preserve our history for the benefit of present and future generations.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Leasehold (Reform) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

12.2 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It gives me great pleasure to move the Second Reading this morning. I pay tribute to the many hon. Members, past and present, who have spent so much time trying to reform our leasehold law. I refer especially to Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, who was one of the first pioneers in the area and who worked so hard on behalf of many leaseholders in his constituency.

His work was subsequently taken up by the present holder of the seat, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), who I am delighted to see in his place today. His solution to the problem of commonhold was described, in that wonderful and admiring phrase used so often by civil servants, as an elegant solution. I am also grateful to the sponsors of the Bill, many of whom have joined me today, and to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) who has been a great supporter of commonhold over the years.

I begin by explaining why the Bill was called the Leasehold (Reform) Bill. When I was successful in the ballot, I was very concerned about the position of leaseholders, and I wished to do something to help them. I am glad that the Government took up my concerns, and that they have included some measures to help leaseholders in the Housing Bill which is currently in Committee. However, the issue of commonhold was not included. It is an unknown form of property law in England and Wales, and I wished to pursue it. That is why the Bill, although called the Leasehold (Reform) Bill, concentrates entirely on commonhold.

All of us remember that the manifestos of the three main parties contained a commitment to commonhold. The reason was that so many of us had, for a long time, been aware of the problems facing leaseholders. I had many meetings with leaseholders in the run-up to the general election, and, as soon as the election was over, at almost my first surgery, the real problems faced by leaseholders were brought home to me in case after case.

As a seaside town, Hastings is not full of the large mansion blocks with which so many of my colleagues have had to deal. We have many smaller properties, where the freeholders have often been families who have decided to move out of the family home, and have divided the home into flats. Inevitably, time passes and the original freeholder dies. The estate decides to sell the freehold, and suddenly, the leaseholders find that they have freeholders of whom they have no knowledge.

The first case that came to my attention was very obvious. On the sea front in Hastings, scaffolding had been erected outside a house several months before I was elected. That scaffolding is still there. The lady who owned the first-floor flat has now had to leave a derelict building. She has lost all her savings, and she has lost her property. The reason was that the freeholder behaved in the most disgraceful way; the problem has not yet been solved.

Similar problems were raised at surgery after surgery. For a while, a steady stream of leaseholders came to complain that their freeholder had instructed the building

[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]

society with which the leaseholder had a mortgage to increase the mortgage to cover the cost of repairs. Without a word to the leaseholder, the building society had agreed to the freeholder's request. People who had budgeted carefully to pay their mortgage were suddenly faced with huge increases in their monthly bills, yet there was no redress.

We also found that there were problems with insurance. In one case, the roof of a building was blown off in the 1987 storm. The freeholder got the insurance money, yet the flat is still not wind and waterproof. There are endless problems with maintenance and repairs. I will not go into the details of those problems, because I am sure that they are familiar to every hon. Member.

One problem faced by leaseholders as a group is that they have no control over the size of the bills for repairs that are presented to them. They often dispute the bills and get their own surveyors, who produce their own schedule of works, which is completely at variance with that of the freeholder. There is then an intransigent stand-off, which is of benefit only to the legal profession.

Because of the various problems that have emerged, our local evening paper, the *Evening Argus*, ran a series of articles. I am sure that London Members here could duplicate the campaign that was run in Hastings, and could give many more details.

One organisation based in Brighton controls 7,000 flats throughout the country. The residents of many of those flats are finding exactly the same problems as those I have described. When 7,000 flats are on one person's books, one is dealing with a major company, not just a small freeholder.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): My hon. Friend referred to London Members, and cases that had come up in her surgery. Has she carried out any comparison with London Members—perhaps with those who have been in the House quite a long time, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) and myself—to ascertain whether the extent of surgery cases about leaseholding, including leaseholding of flats, has at all diminished since the 1980s or the 1970s?

Despite the needs that she has described and that have given rise to her Bill, is it not possible that the number of surgery cases concerning leaseholding has diminished for the past generation? Perhaps in general the leaseholders' regime is already better than it was a decade or two back.

Mrs. Lait: If my hon. Friend speaks in the debate, I am sure that he will say whether his caseload has diminished. As a new Member, I have certainly not found any diminution in the number of cases on the subject.

In fact, I had a gentle disagreement with my local paper's editor, who is not from Hastings, about whether an article that I had written on my Bill for the paper should be published. I suggested that he might find it very interesting if he published the article, because I assured him that it was a problem in Hastings. Much to my amazement, let alone his, for the first time ever, my article prompted letters addressed to me rather than to the paper. I have, as a consequence picked up at least another half dozen leasehold cases.

I am therefore not convinced that, in my part of the world, the problem has gone away. I very much hope that the amendments to the Housing Bill will help leaseholders.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing this excellent measure. As my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) has called me in aid, may I say that problems faced by leaseholders in my constituency have increased over the past year? The situation has no doubt been aided by the splendid campaign organised by the *Evening Standard*. I applaud my hon. Friend because, in a constructive way, she is trying to tackle problems, and I hope that she will get every support from Her Majesty's Government.

Mrs. Lait: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that very helpful support. The exchange between my hon. Friends and myself has shown that there is a problem not just in London but wherever leaseholding as a legal form exists.

One of the much more dramatic problems that has emerged since 1993 for small blocks of flats in my constituency is the leaseholders' difficulty in purchasing their freehold. I have referred previously to Doreen Slennett, who has been trying to purchase the freehold from the freeholder, who happens to share the same address as the managing agents. That is just one of the loopholes in the law that leaseholders are finding more and more offensive. I very much hope that we shall begin to see an end to leaseholders' difficulties in asserting their legal rights.

I have described the problems that leaseholders have faced in my constituency, and I am sure that we will hear many more. Taken together, they show that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with long leasehold as a form of property holding. That is recognised not only by those of us with huge surgery caseloads but by all the main parties. As I mentioned, they all supported commonhold in their manifestos. I have also had support from the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the British Property Federation, which I understand has been reassured by some of the larger London estates it represents that they support the introduction of commonhold.

The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors also supports the Bill, as do leasehold organisations such as the campaign against residential leasehold abuse. I have received many letters from supporters—I know that some of them are here today—who are very keen that commonhold, as an alternative to leaseholding, is introduced, so that they can convert their leaseholds into a freehold in a commonhold association. Campaigns run by local and national papers have been mentioned—those run by the *Evening Standard* and *The Times* are known. It is accepted that the system of leasehold is under severe strain and that we should be introducing commonhold, which is the purpose of my Bill.

Commonhold exists in practically every other country in the world in one form or another. When I came south from Scotland, I was amazed to come across the leasehold system; it does not exist in Scotland. Scotland has managed for many years with a system of property law which operates in the notorious tenements of Glasgow as well as the blocks of flats in Edinburgh's New Town where I lived when I was first married—where, although

common parts are held individually, everybody is responsible for them and knows precisely the extent of their responsibility. It has worked very satisfactorily. It is therefore a shock to discover the difficulties in England.

There is commonhold in Australia. Mr. Tim Sebbage, who is working in Germany but has a leasehold on a flat in London, has given me a great deal of advice on how the German system works. It sounds very similar to the Scottish system, and works very satisfactorily.

My Bill, which is fairly slim as Bills go, but probably quite thick for a private Member's Bill, sets out the principles of commonhold. It goes no further than that, because I very much wanted to be able to debate the principles of commonhold. When commonhold is introduced into English and Welsh law, it will probably initially be of most use to those who are building new developments. One of the criteria for a commonhold association will be that it can apply not only to domestic developments but to mixed developments.

There is often contention in developments where shops are underneath leasehold flats and it is not possible to enfranchise. If a developer wishes in future to produce a mixed development and sets up a commonhold association, each person who buys a freehold in that development will be able to work with others in ensuring that the management of the block is undertaken by themselves. That is a sensible way forward. It will encourage a diversity of developments instead of a monolithic approach. Given the long-term disfavour into which leaseholding is falling, it may be a way forward for freeholders who decide to get out of leaseholding and to establish a mixed development themselves.

Let us say, for example, that a block has ground-floor shops. The freeholder can sell the freehold to shops and the leaseholders can acquire their leaseholds. They can then together establish a commonhold association. We shall see long leaseholding as a form of property ownership wither on the vine.

Existing and successful leasehold associations would not necessarily wish to move to commonhold. I suspect that, in practice, there is not a great deal of difference in the way in which they would carry out their business. My Bill, however, would give them the opportunity to make the move if they wished to do so.

A key feature of the Bill is that it provides for both the setting up and winding up of a commonhold association. We are all aware that neighbours sometimes fall out—there has been some local newspaper coverage of that subject recently. Should an association need to be wound up, it is crucial that provision should be made for that process.

The system set out in the Bill is probably the most sensible way forward. If it is necessary to wind up an association, the effect of the Bill would be to convert each freeholder's interest in the association in a share. When the association is sold, in whatever way, the commonholder will have a share of any assets realised. At the same time, they would have to be liable for any debts of the association. One hopes that most associations would be run in a way that ensured that there would be no such debts.

I am conscious that I have attracted a great deal of support for my Bill today. That being so, I shall not talk for much longer. I shall merely say that commonhold is the missing part of English and Welsh property law. I accept that it represents a radical change. It may be regarded as unusual for a Conservative Member to introduce radical legislation—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am glad to know that we are all awake. It is sometimes necessary, however, to produce a radical solution to a problem, and especially one that has dogged so many of us for so long.

I believe that commonhold offers hope to leaseholders. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to promise me significant progress on commonhold. Not only many Members on both sides of the House but millions outside this place want to see the introduction of commonhold as soon as possible.

12.23 pm

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) on introducing the Bill. It represents a progressive step forward, but, in my view, it is a conservative effort on the hon. Lady's part. I do not think that the Bill goes far enough in providing the rights that leaseholders need for their protection.

I shall comment briefly on the history of some of the legislation that has been introduced in response to the weaknesses of leasehold reform as embodied in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987. In addition, the Leasehold Reform Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 was inadequate and ineffective. Many leaseholders have been disappointed by these reforms. High expectations have led leaseholders to demand clear and effective legislation from the Government.

Leaseholders are lobbying their Members to put pressure on the Government to introduce positive legislation. I have received many inquiries from my constituents.

Leasehold is a form of residential tenure. It is a throwback to feudalism, as every Member knows. It gives exceptional privileges and powers to landowners. It enables them to retain an interest in land and property, while at the same time selling leases for limited periods. At the end of each of these periods, the landowner can sell a further lease. By this means, a relatively few landowners have been able to accumulate substantial fortunes through the ownership of land. Leasehold has concentrated wealth in the hands of the few rather than the many.

The case for reform is overwhelming. Britain is almost unique in the world in retaining the leasehold system. In other countries, different and more modern arrangements have developed to achieve a better balance between the interests of landowners and those who occupy residential property and to enable individuals to enjoy the benefit of freehold, even where they live in blocks of flats.

Over recent decades, the weaknesses and injustices inherent in the British leasehold system have been increasingly highlighted, but reform has been a long time coming. The first—and to date the most effective—reform of the system was Labour's 1967 Leasehold Reform Act, which gave leaseholders living in houses the opportunity to buy out the freehold interest or obtain an extension of their lease. Many thousands of people have benefited from that Act. The 1993 Act involves such complex procedures and red tape that few, if any, leaseholders have benefited from it.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is it not tragic that, when the 1993 Act went through, Labour Members, with one

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

or two Conservative Members, repeatedly spelled out that it would not achieve anything like what the Government claimed that it would?

Mr. Khabra: I agree with my hon. Friend. That shows that we have been more concerned about giving rights to the leaseholder than have the Conservatives.

The 1993 Act made so many concessions to the interests of the big landlords that its whole purpose was effectively undermined. As a result, only a few leaseholders have been able to buy out freeholds. The present legislation is complex, and difficult for the public to comprehend. Many of the people who come to my surgeries do not understand the law, and have to go to solicitors. They find it difficult to get satisfactory answers, even after paying large fees. We need the new commonhold tenure, which will extend to leaseholders new opportunities to own and manage their homes.

The Government's current leasehold reform proposals are inadequate and likely to end in disaster, as did the previous ones. This is another feeble effort by the Government to mislead leaseholders. The Government do not have the courage to confront the vested interests of large landlords, who are known to make donations to Tory party funds.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I have been listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman. I am sorry that he is trying to turn the debate into a partisan shouting match. Matters relating to commonhold and leasehold are necessarily complicated. It is not as easy as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Will he comment on the Government's five specific amendments to the Housing Bill which in large measure deal with many of the problems about which he complains? They would close the loophole of the right of first refusal, separate forfeiture procedures because of the dispute on service charges—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It would be better if the hon. Member sought to catch my eye to make a speech later, because this is meant to be intervention.

Mr. Khabra: I said at the beginning of my speech that I appreciated what was being introduced, but it does not go far enough, or provide the rights that leaseholders need. I am also aware that the five recommendations to which the hon. Gentleman refers have not yet been published.

Furthermore, the Government are adamant in their refusal to introduce commonhold as an alternative to the present rotten leasehold system. Although they pledged to do so in their last manifesto, that is yet another broken Tory promise. For too long, leaseholders have been treated in a shabby way. They have been right to demand that the Government take positive action to find a long-term solution to end their misery, rather than tinker with the present discredited system.

I am sure that many Members of Parliament have received letters from constituents who are worried about the demands made by unscrupulous landlords and managing agents for extortionate service charges. They are being intimidated, and threatened with forfeiture of their properties. There is widespread concern among leaseholders throughout the country about the lack of protection and safeguards against abuse under the existing legislation.

Some constituents of mine have written me a letter about the problem that they are having with their landlord. I should like to quote the relevant parts of the letter. Mr. David Thompson and Miss Yasmin Mirza wrote:

"Dear Mr. P. Khabra,

We are writing to you, as first time buyers who purchased the above property in November 1994, on a 125 year leasehold, with the hope that you may be in a position to help, or advise the best way forward with regard to us buying our freehold.

We purchased the property from Dao Heng Bank Plc, who at the time were also the freeholders. At the time of purchase we had been informed by the acting Estate Agents that there would be an opportunity in the future for us to buy the freehold. This was one of the main contributing factors for our purchase of the above property.

In June of last year, to our surprise we received notification from Dao Heng's solicitors . . . that the freehold had been sold to Cyril Freedman Ltd, alias our new landlord. Following on from this notification, we also received a letter from our new landlord, Cyril Freedman, requesting that we make an interim payment for the sum of £450.00, in lieu of 'service charges' . . .

The above property is in a building comprising of eight individual flats, converted in 1989, and hence all tenants are recently new to the property. Having discussed our concerns regarding the freehold sale with fellow tenants, it was apparent that the majority of tenants were also led to believe that they should of had the opportunity or at least had an interest in buying the freehold. After further discussions one of the tenants approached her solicitor for further advice.

The solicitor advised that, as tenants, we should have received 'First right of Refusal' for the purchase of the freehold, and that we should serve notice on Cyril Freedman Ltd under section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 . . . We were also informed by our solicitor that we had a requisite majority, ie) the names and signatures of four qualifying tenants, but if we wanted to formally respond under this Act we had to do so within 30 days of receiving notification of the sale.

Unfortunately due to these timescales we were unable to gain further signatures, as some of the tenants were on holiday, and the notice had to be served in a matter of days.

We have since received confirmation from the remaining tenants that, had they been available at the time, they would have been more than willing to put forward their names. Like most of the tenants we were at the time not aware of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987, giving tenants 'First Right of Refusal'".

I must emphasise that the new Bill should contain a provision that full information should be made available to all leaseholders who want to buy their freeholds.

"On the 31st July 1995, having issued follow up letters through our solicitor we had still not received a response from Cyril Freedman Ltd. At this point we were advised and actually issued through our solicitor court proceedings, for a 'Declaration Order' namely that we have the requisite majority in respect of Qualifying Tenants and an Injunction Order requiring the Landlords to serve us with the requisite information under the Act . . .

The appointed management agent for Cyril Freedman Ltd is David Glass Associates (DGA), and for reference both Cyril Freedman and DGA reside at the same address!!

We have since received various threatening letters from DGA, chasing up the outstanding payment of £450.00. In one of their more recent letters they stated that they 'will serve proceedings for forfeiture of the lease and possession' of our flat. On the advice of our solicitor we have responded to these letters, explaining that we are taking legal proceedings under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987."

What a scandal. I will not quote the rest of the letter, as it is not relevant.

I urge the Minister, therefore, to incorporate new clauses in the Bill, including: a right to manage; sanctions against the failure of landowners to abide by existing legislation; fairer and simpler valuation procedures; and streamlined rules for enfranchisement to cut through unnecessary red tape preventing leaseholders from buying the freehold of their homes.

Anything short of those measures will not give leaseholders the opportunity of freehold ownership. In other words, the so-called party of ownership should put its money where its mouth is.

12.37 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): Since I entered the House, eight years ago, I have introduced eight commonhold or leasehold reform Bills. In 1992, I was made "Radical of the Year"—to take up the phrase used earlier—because of that fact. "Bore of the Year" would have been a more appropriate title—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] It is certainly true that on none of those occasions did I match the eloquence and skill of my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) in bringing this legislation before the House.

My hon. Friend did not merely make a good speech—this is not an Opposition motion or the fluffing out of a ten-minute Bill—but presented a complete piece of well-thought-out, skilfully crafted legislation in a truly elegant Bill that shows many of the hallmarks of the work and effort put in by the Lord Chancellor's Department during the many years that we have been trying to get commonhold on the statute book.

I was slightly depressed by the previous debate on treasure trove, which was trying to put a mediaeval law right and bring it up to the late 20th century. We want a law on commonhold in the late 20th century to put an 18th-century law right—a single judgment on which all leasehold is based, which makes it impossible to enforce a positive covenant.

Now, some 200 years later, we are finally close to being able to allow the millions of our citizens who live in multi-occupancy flats and apartments to have the same rights of freehold as those living in suburban houses. The intention is to provide them with the rights that are enjoyed everywhere else in the world. It is extraordinary that, for example, the American system of a co-operative or condominium is not allowed under English or Welsh law. It is extraordinary that the way in which millions of Europeans live in apartment blocks—"copropriété" as it is called—is not allowed under English or Welsh law.

The Bill is in such a complete state that it could be passed as it is. It sets to rights the very real concerns expressed by many people living in leasehold property without the right of freehold. With only 38 clauses, it steers its way sensibly and clearly through a legal minefield—no other aspect of the law is more difficult than property law.

One has to ask why the Bill has taken so long and why, alas, we fear that it may take longer still. I hope that I shall not be described as cynical, but perhaps the answer is that the House enjoys adversarial politics so much that any measure that is not widely opposed does not get noticed. Perhaps if the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), who has done so much to advance the cause of commonhold, were to say that the Bill was an evil Tory plot to extend the rights of home ownership, Conservative Members would get a little more excited about it. However, I know that the hon. Gentleman would not say such a thing. Perhaps the proposal has been in the doldrums for so long precisely because no one is criticising it.

In 1987, the Law Commission came up with its review. It was the result of problems that had existed for 10 or 20 years and whose ferocity was mounting. The problems did not start in 1987, but it was the first clear sign that our Law Officers were unhappy with the law.

In 1991, the then Minister for Housing and Planning, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), made a speech that lightened the hearts of many of us. He said:

> "The Government have decided to introduce for England and Wales a scheme providing for the freehold ownership and communal management of flats and other interdependent buildings with shared facilities. This new scheme, called commonhold, was proposed in 1987"

by the Law Commission. He went on:

> "It is proposed that commonhold should be available for all types of land use—whether residential or commercial . . . In addition to providing for the freehold ownership of flats and other relevant properties, the scheme would establish standard democratic management arrangements".—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1991; Vol. 194, c. 1239.]

That speech is a distant but clear echo of what my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye said today.

It is worth looking back to that 1991 debate because it underlines my point, which is that everyone is on the same side in this instance. The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), who was then the Opposition spokesman on housing, welcomed the proposal; Sir Hugh Rossi, who was then the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green, welcomed it; the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) welcomed it, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who has long had an interest in the subject. Mr. William Benyon, who then represented Milton Keynes and who was a fierce opponent of much leasehold reform, welcomed the commonhold proposals.

That was an early sign of the extent of the agreement. Then came the party manifestos. Both the Conservative party manifesto and the Labour party manifesto contained a clear commitment to commonhold. I know that the Conservative party's manifesto contained that commitment, because I put it in myself. The hon. Member for Greenwich probably placed the commitment in his party's manifesto.

The measure is favoured by the big estates, which were my bitter opponents during the process of leasehold reform. Credit should be given where it is due: the first organisation to float a commonhold paper—before even the Law Commission—was the Grosvenor estate. It has said throughout that it is a sensible, progressive and overdue reform of the law.

The measure has been favoured by Back Benchers who were opposed to leasehold reform. In my last feeble attempt to introduce a commonhold Bill into the House on 17 May last year, I carefully gained the support, in a

[Mr. Dudley Fishburn]

ten-minute Bill, of a number of hon. Members who had opposed leasehold reform, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), who had spoken out with great effect against some of the measures in the leasehold reform Bill. He supported the commonhold measure, as did my right hon. Friends the Members for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) and for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), my hon. Friends the Members for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and others.

It is important for Ministers to realise that there is a universal thrust in support of the measure. It is favoured not just by those hon. Members I mentioned but by Members of another place, who did so much to scupper the leasehold reform proposals. It is supported by academics and by building societies and the Council of Mortgage Lenders, which realise at first hand how much better it would be to be able to advance a mortgage on an apartment or a flat underwritten by a freehold—that is to say, a commonhold—than one underwritten by the dwindling asset of a complicated lease.

The measure is supported by developers—a point touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye—because developers who are building a project from scratch do not want to be left with a residual freehold once they have sold the leasehold; they want to be out of the property. They would much rather those people who had bought into the shops, the shopping mall and the flats above it were the owners of that property. The developers could make the development and be gone.

What went wrong? Why has the measure taken so long to reach this stage? There are two reasons: the first is that, the more the Bill was worked on—after the initial Law Commission report and the 1,000 replies, all of which supported commonhold, were sent to the Lord Chancellor's Department—the more complicated it became. I remember seeing the proposals for commonhold at one stage and they looked like two thick telephone books—they were, perhaps, bigger than the Scott report. Clearly, the matter had got out of control, as more and more people put in bells and whistles—80 pages were devoted to winding up commonholds.

It is quite remarkable that my hon. Friend has managed to produce a well-worked-out piece of legislation that extends to 38 clauses, in which the winding up of commonhold is reduced to 11 clear and legally apposite clauses. We have pulled back from the enormous wad of legislation that might have come out of the Lord Chancellor's Department had we adopted commonhold earlier. I know that the Cabinet Committees that look at these things always met the representative of the Lord Chancellor's Department with a sigh as he came in bearing the two enormous and heavy tomes that were to constitute such a simple new form of land tenure. This real difficulty has now been surmounted by the Lord Chancellor's Department, which has done so much work, and by my hon. Friend.

We also have not got as far as we should have because commonhold has been caught up with leasehold reform. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye made it very plain this morning that, although we are here under the official title of the Leasehold (Reform) Bill, this is a commonhold Bill—therefore, it is a particular delight to see my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in the Chamber, and not someone from the Department of the Environment. The Bill is about the law rather than about housing.

Commonhold is not a leasehold reform measure, although, in Standing Committee on the last Leasehold (Reform) Bill, the hon. Member for Greenwich and I made much play of the fact that we should have commonhold in it. We received many reassurances that it was not necessary to have commonhold in the Bill because it was to come along soon and would be on the statute book, perhaps even ahead of the leasehold reforms. However, that has not happened, and much progress is to be made.

As a result of the difficult battles over the leasehold reforms, when something comes to the Government's business managers with leasehold reform on it, they carefully—and quite understandably—shuffle it to the bottom of the pile and the danger signals flash. How many dukes will be leaving the Tory party if this measure goes through?

There are no such dangers in relation to this measure. As I said earlier, everyone—not least the landlords and the property industry—wants this measure. I hope that the message will go out clearly from this morning's debate that this issue should not make danger signals flash, but has the support of those who are interested in getting a proper form of property tenure.

The Bill has the support of the building society industry because it knows that commonhold is a better bet for lending money on than a diminishing leasehold. It knows that, once this measure is adopted, the market will work and that a commonhold flat that comes on to the market will command a premium over a leasehold flat. A first-time buyer will say, "Here are two similar properties—which would I rather have? Of course, I would rather have one that has a commonhold underpinning it, because I know that I will not have a diminishing asset." As Conservatives, we believe in the market—it is the market, not politicians, that will make this measure a huge success. It is our job to act as midwives and to ensure that it is legally possible.

The other great advantage will be that every commonhold property will have the same rights and—let us not forget this—the same responsibilities as every other commonhold property. Every leasehold property in the land has a different set of rights, responsibilities and small print. There will be an enormous simplification of the law.

Mr. Jessel: Can my hon. Friend make it clear whether he thinks that the Bill would diminish the choice of those who want purposely to select a diminishing asset? Supposing a man aged 75 wanted to move to a smaller home and preferred to buy a flat with just 25 years to run on its lease, so that he could spend more in the remaining years of his life on expensive holidays. Would the Bill diminish the range of flats available for such a man to choose from?

Mr. Fishburn: No, it would not. There will still be a variety of leaseholds available, particularly in the shorter-term market, because leaseholds under 21 years will not even be covered by the enfranchisement rights in the Bill. Therefore, all leases under 21 years would tend to remain as leaseholds and would not become commonholds.

For the reasons I have already made clear, no measure is better designed for the last year of a Parliament than the Bill. No measure is better for inclusion in the Queen's Speech in the autumn of this year in the months running up to the election. The Cabinet fixes the contents of the Queen's Speech in May and early June each year, so this debate is opportune and well timed.

If we are able to show the Minister that both sides of the House would be happy to see the well-worked-out commonhold measure on the statute book and that it could pass through the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the necessarily feverish atmosphere before the general election, it is highly likely that the Bill will be adopted in the Queen's Speech. I look to the hon. Member for Greenwich to reassure us that, should such a measure be included in next year's legislative programme, his party will do its best to see it reach the statute book.

The Bill is now ready to be adopted. It is ready—perhaps 200 years late—to become part of British law, and I hope that it will do so.

12.56 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): First, may I make it absolutely clear that I greatly welcome the Bill? Although it is unusual to be keen to be here on a Friday morning, I was pleased to have the opportunity to listen to the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) and for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), who made a good case for commonhold.

Like many hon. Members, I have had to deal with the great difficulties of constituents who have experienced problems with the leases on their properties. From earlier debates, it is clear that, in many parts of London, the only way in which to buy property is to buy one on leasehold. That in itself is a reason for reform. Many of my constituents have come to my surgery and recounted the great difficulties they have had through high service charges and in buying their freehold under previous legislation. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), I greatly supported the campaign by the *Evening Standard* to introduce further changes to the law.

I must confess, however, to a great sense of deja vu. When I first came to the House in 1992, one of the great measures of that Parliament was the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Bill. It was an enormous Bill, and my impression was that it would solve all leasehold property problems almost at a stroke, and would give many rights to leaseholders. It is a matter of great regret that the experience of my constituents since then has revealed that, for various reasons, that Act has not succeeded in achieving its objectives.

I am not a lawyer, so I cannot say why the Act has failed its objectives in law. I know that there have been all sorts of debates about the extent to which the Upper House decided to dilute that legislation. Perhaps its Members should share much of responsibility for the failure of that legislation's objectives.

I re-read the Second Reading debate on 3 November 1992 to remind myself what was then promised. There was great optimism that the leasehold reform measures would achieve the desired objective. In that debate, the Secretary of State promised that there would soon be a commonhold Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington alluded to that. Why have we not had on the statute book a measure with such universal support? I echo the plea to the Government seriously to address that issue.

On Second Reading, the Secretary of State said that half of all leaseholders found problems with their freeholders. That is an astonishing proportion. If the measures in that Bill and in the current Housing Bill, which may be amended to strengthen the rights of leaseholders, and the measures in this Bill, take effect, they will go a long way towards redressing the imbalance.

I am not a lawyer, and I do not profess to understand the intricacies of property law. My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington spoke about two big volumes that almost equal the size of the Scott report and deal with one aspect of commonhold. I congratulate him on producing a Bill that is at least small. I confess that I do not understand every clause, because lawyers have a wonderful way of drafting legislation that makes it difficult for us mere mortals to understand. I suppose that that is why we pay so much when we seek their advice.

I understand that the property tenure of leasehold is unique to England and Wales. There is debate about why there is such a property tenure at all, but I understand that the Bill does not seek to abolish the tenure—perhaps it should. The Bill provides the opportunity in law for the right to have commonhold as a tenure, and that must be right, because the public are greatly confused. Many of those who first enter the property market buy a flat or a maisonette, and there is often no choice between a freehold and a leasehold property.

Back in the long distant days of 1972, when I got married, I sought to buy a property at a time of gazumping. What a difference there was in the property market at that time: I should not like to see the return of gazumping. Property prices were going up fast, and our only choice was a recently built maisonette in south Norwood. It was leasehold, and we paid ground rent. Fortunately, there were no problems, but we did not have the choice of buying freehold.

People come to my surgery and say, "I own my property but I have a terrible problem. I have a bill of £2,000 for repairs, and I do not understand it." When I hear that, I think, "Hang on, this person owns his property." I have to pinch myself to appreciate that, although he owns it, he does not, because someone else can put difficult obligations on him. That is why I strongly oppose leasehold tenure as a form of property ownership: it is neither one thing nor the other.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington introduced a ten-minute Bill last year, and I have read the excellent speech that he made then. His speech today was also excellent. My hon. Friend said that, if his ten-minute Bill had been passed, within a generation there would be no leasehold. I am not sure about the length of a generation, but I am sure that my hon. Friend was absolutely right.

I have a brief comment about a matter that is part of the general debate about leasehold reform. The Bill does not tackle the difficult problem facing the limited group of leaseholders who decided to purchase their local authority flats. I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington to consider whether there might be a way of dealing with the problem.

[Mr. David Congdon]

In some ways, such leaseholders are in a much more difficult position than people who lease private flats. One of the distinct differences is that, when they lease a flat from the local authority, they are often in a minority in the block of flats; the others remain local authority tenants.

Unlike a private landlord, a local authority often spends large sums of money refurbishing the block of flats. I have two serious examples. In the first, the council is doing the usual work—putting in new windows, central heating, kitchens, bathrooms and the like—at a cost per flat of roughly £8,000 per year. For someone who has bought a £40,000 council flat for, say, £24,000 after the discount, to spend £8,000 against one's will on the property's refurbishment is an enormous burden.

The other example is even worse. In blocks of flats where, understandably, the local authority wants to put overcladding on the outside to keep flats totally watertight, with all the refurbishment, the cost ends up at a staggering £22,000 per flat. Some of my constituents are faced with such a bill. They cannot afford to pay that £22,000. It is unlikely that they will secure a mortgage, because the property is not worth much money. They are often in a worse position than leaseholders of private property.

Although it might be possible in law to strengthen their position dramatically and to give them many more rights, the matter needs to be considered, because, for leaseholders, such bills are unacceptable and make the concept of owner-occupation meaningless.

Mrs. Lait: I hope to reassure my hon. Friend that, under commonhold, it will be possible, under certain conditions, for people whose freeholder is the social landlord to have commonhold, but the issue is more likely to be dealt with under the housing legislation that hon. Members are considering.

Mr. Congdon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that bit of optimism. It could be a big bit of optimism if the Housing Bill achieved that effect. I was pleased that, on 18 January, the Secretary of State for the Environment announced that he would introduce, I think, five measures to strengthen leaseholders' position. I do not mind whether changes to the Housing Bill or to a commonhold Bill achieve the desired objective, which must be that anyone who aspires to home ownership is encouraged to own a home, and, having acquired it, really owns it. They must not be in the crazy position whereby bills of a magnitude that they cannot afford can be imposed on them.

Those people have no control over those bills and, to all intents and purposes, the ownership of the property is meaningless to them. That must be changed. In that spirit, I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's Bill and hope that the Minister will be able to say when the Government will introduce a suitable measure to deal with that serious anomaly.

1.8 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am grateful to be called. I apologise for an overlong intervention on the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) and will do penance by making a short speech.

I join my hon. Friends in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) on introducing this important and radical Bill. For reasons that she explained, she calls it the Leasehold (Reform) Bill. She need not worry. It has nothing to do with leasehold reform; it involves the new concept of commonhold.

The other week, the Government Whip on duty instigated a debate by moving the Adjournment of the House. At the end of the debate, the Government's supporters were encouraged to vote against the Adjournment of the House. We did. If my memory serves me correctly, we won the Division by one vote, and the Government Whip on duty immediately moved the Adjournment of the House. I am trying very hard to learn about the procedures of this House.

Constituents have raised three particular grievances about this area of the law. First, a number complained that they thought that, under legislation, they had the right of first refusal to buy their freeholds. In fact, the owner went over their heads and sold the ownership to another party. It is absolutely right that, as a matter of urgency, we should reinforce part 1 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 to deal with that problem, through stiffer penalties or whatever.

The second principal concern that has been expressed to me by constituents is that there are sometimes two freeholders who affect the property in which they live. In one case, the building itself is owned by one freeholder, while the ground immediately in front of it—if the leaseholders do not get control over that ground, living in the property is nonsense—is owned by another freeholder. That problem should be addressed.

Perhaps my strongest criticism concerns cases in which a leaseholder tries to deal with a freeholder when he or she has been presented with what he or she regards as unfair service charges, and is then immediately threatened with forfeiture procedures. That is quite wrong. There are other problems, but those are the main ones.

I am especially pleased—my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) mentioned this—that, on 18 January, the Secretary of State for the Environment announced that he would table five amendments to the Housing Bill. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) has reminded us that they have not yet been dealt with. Whether those amendments will be dealt with on Report or in Committee I do not know. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can enlighten us on that point. I know that the Government have acted.

I take up one point made by the hon. Member for Southall. Introducing legislation in this complex area means that we may find that there are still loopholes, or areas that have not been covered. I think that the Government are going about the matter in the right way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East said that he would like the leasehold concept to disappear. I think that there is a case for leasehold, and I pray in aid my own humble property. I occupy the ground floor of a very modest property, and somebody else occupies the first floor. I would rather deal with a managing agent representing the freeholder than with the person upstairs. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name him."] That is not a reflection on the person who lives upstairs, whose sex I will not give. He—[*Laughter.*] He could equally say, "I do not want to

deal with the gracious gentleman who lives downstairs, because he is not there 52 weeks in the year, and I may not know where to get hold of him." There is a case for leasehold; it has an important part to play. More importantly, leaseholders should have the right to buy the freehold or to enter the new concept of commonhold.

The Bill has 38 clauses. I very much took to heart what my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) said about the complexities of these matters. They are difficult, and we must look at the whole matter carefully.

I join my hon. Friends—and, I am sure, the hon. Members for Greenwich and for Southall—in paying tribute my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington. I am told that he is not standing at the next election. That will be an undoubted loss for the parliamentary Conservative party, as I would like to think it will be for the whole House. I pay tribute to his skill and perseverance in proposing all the commonhold Bills over the past eight years. I am glad that his surrogate, my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye, looks as if she will achieve the aim of his hard work.

I back the Bill. It is timely. I hope that it is not the last year before the next election, to take up the point made my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington. I am very happy to remain in the House until well into May next year, and see a new Session, but that is not matter for me. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.15 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I very strongly support the concept of commonhold and therefore the Bill. As far as I am concerned, the sooner commonhold is introduced the better. I regard it as a piece of unfinished business, not only because there is a clear and extant Government pledge to bring in commonhold but because I do not regard leasehold enfranchisement, important though that is, complete without commonhold. Indeed, I originally very strongly supported leasehold enfranchisement on the understanding that commonhold would be swift on its heels to make it a more effective and manageable innovation.

I am greatly impressed by the initiative shown by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) in promoting the Bill. She is very assiduous in the House and is known to be so in her constituency. It is typical of her to use this opportunity to introduce a measure that will directly benefit her constituents and that springs from her experience of constituency case work.

To an extent, I have experienced the problem of heavy constituency case work arising from leasehold problems. It is somewhat ironic that in the first case that I handled—an elderly lady who faced a one year's service charge bill of more than £20,000 because of major works planned for the property in which she lived—the freeholder's company happened to be based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye, which of course I do not at all hold against my hon. Friend. The Bill is excellent and she is doing the House a great favour by introducing it.

There are two principal reasons why I support commonhold. The first springs from the cases that I have mentioned—showing the clear inadequacy of leasehold and the necessity to find measures that can overcome such problems. The introduction of commonhold is therefore very important to the success of enfranchisement. It is also important to bear in mind the sort of problems that are increasingly emerging as a result of leasehold. Incidentally, I find that the weight of case work and other problems caused by it are increasing.

I certainly accept some leasehold arrangements work perfectly satisfactorily. Indeed, I was a leaseholder in a very happy arrangement with a managing agent and a freeholder who owned the property. The problem is that happy arrangements are dependent not so much on the operation of the law on the good will of the landlord. If that good will is not present, or if a bad landlord purchases the freehold, the whole happy arrangement collapses.

There are two particular sorts of unhappy consequence. One is where a rapacious freeholder simply buys properties to use leaseholders as milch cows to generate cash. There are many easy ways in which they can load unreasonable charges on leaseholders. There are many complex arrangements available to freeholders, which I shall not go into, to enable them to raise money from leaseholders. In such cases, it is not surprising that leaseholders wish there to be a remedy. It is unsatisfactory that the law as it stands cannot easily provide that remedy.

The arrangement goes wrong also when the freeholder is essentially a property speculator and buys a property because he or she—or it, if it is a company—sees an advantage in developing it. There was an especially good—or bad—example of that in my constituency. The firm of managing agents and the freeholder had a close relationship. Indeed, it was suggested by some that they were the same people. They bought properties because they saw the possibility of extending them upwards and downwards—in other words, developing basements and attics and adding on, as it were, to increase capital values and to generate the extra income that would ensue.

The only way of overcoming such problems is by radically changing leasehold law. Commonhold is one important way of achieving that.

My second reason for supporting the concept of commonhold so strongly is that I believe that English property law needs a new form of tenure. Commonhold answers that demand. I rather agree with my hon. Friend the Member for hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon), who said that he would like to see leasehold disappear. I regard it as an anachronistic form of tenure. Perhaps it should have withered on the vine along with socage, frankalmoin, serjeanty, copyhold and other forms of mediaeval property holding which eventually disappeared in 1660 or 1925, or at some stage in between.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) said, leasehold has been under a question mark for 200 years. Its origins, however, date back even further than that. It is necessary to bring the law up to date and tidy it by doing away with such a form of tenure. The introduction of commonhold would be a major step in that direction and would considerably improve and clarify the law.

There is another problem that might be taken up as we examine the Bill or through the tabling of amendments to it. It might also be taken up in another form of leasehold reform. The problem is that leaseholders may remain as a minority in a building, and are therefore unable to enfranchise and unable to take advantage of commonhold. In that situation, there remain significant weaknesses that

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we must try to remove. I compliment the Government on their planned amendments to the Housing Bill, which to an extent will address the problem. There are, especially, the problems of forfeiture and the ability of leaseholders to challenge unreasonable service charges that are imposed on them by freeholders. That is one of my basic reasons for supporting commonhold.

I remain extremely concerned about leaseholders of local authorities or, in the case of my constituency, of Broomleigh housing association, which took over the property in question from the council. That association has imposed extremely high service charges on a number of leaseholders—in some instances in excess of £25,000 for one year—for capital works. Such sums are often considerably more than the property's original purchase price. The people involved are incapable of paying such service charges, which are completely unreasonable. The matter has been handled badly. There is some evidence that, while the handling has been improved, the law behind it has not yet been adjusted accordingly.

Mechanisms are needed to prevent unreasonable service charges from being levied. Last year, I introduced a ten-minute Bill which proposed measures to deal with that. Some of them have been taken up by the Government's amendments to the Housing Bill. I was especially keen on capping the charge that could be imposed in any year. Reasonably set, that would enable landlords still to carry out their duties and exercise their freedoms but would also have protected leaseholders. I hope that that, too, can be considered as part of the overall reform of leasehold law, of which I believe commonhold is an important part.

For all those reasons, I strongly support this reform, which I regard as part of a package of leasehold reform measures, some of which have already been carried out and some of which are yet to come. It is a complex matter; property law always has been. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye has made a valiant attempt to make it as simple as possible, on which I congratulate her. I hope that by this Bill, or through other means, commonhold will be introduced into law as quickly as possible.

1.25 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I am grateful for the chance to speak in the debate and support my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) who has introduced this Bill to put right a wrong about which many hon. Members have spoken. The problems that leaseholders face are difficult, and often make their lives hell. It is right that the House should, as a matter of urgency, put that right. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) on his patience and determination in bringing up this matter in a sort of Brandon Rhys Williams memorial Bill. We owe it to our former colleague to ensure that Brandon's ideas are brought into law in full. That the matter is set out so simply in the Bill is a credit to all concerned.

It does not matter whether this is part of a great radical reforming agenda or rampant conservatism. I would take being accused of being a Conservative by the Opposition and of being a radical by a Conservative Member both as compliments. I can happily live with both. It does not matter whether this is part of leasehold reform or establishes a new agenda or form of land tenure. I regard it as reforming the leasehold land tenure system.

Hon. Members have come to the debate because they recognise that leasehold is not working in the way that it should. That has been going on for a long time. As hon. Members have said, the Government first recognised the problem officially in the late 1980s. Draft Bills of one sort of another have been appearing for nearly 10 years. Even lawyers should be able to reach agreement among themselves in that time. However, nothing astounds me about lawyers and they may want to argue about whether it is 10, nine or eight years. That could make it take longer for them to sort it out.

It has been said, rightly, that the Government are making valiant efforts to put right some of the wrongs. We know how leaseholders have been treated. It is sad in a way, because leaseholding can work perfectly well where there is good will on both sides. There would no need to detain the House if all landlords behaved reasonably, but it is clear that they do not. We need reform to make sure that people who are being abused by freeholders are protected.

I am impressed by the Bill. I started my London political career in Dulwich. Lewis Silkin had brought forward the Leasehold Reform Act 1967. I was the chairman of Dulwich constituency Conservative party—after it was brought in, but not that much after. My party gave up that seat because it put forward a candidate—who later represented another seat in the House—who supported the leasehold system. That was a lesson in my political life, and it should be a lesson to my colleagues in the Government that there is a need to take action. There are political consequences when we do not put right a wrong, and this is a wrong that must be put right.

In my constituency, I have seen the way in which the relationship between freeholders and leaseholders has broken down. Like other hon. Members, I have had case after case of abuse by people who have bought up freeholds so that they can squeeze the last drop of money out of innocent home owners who never expected that to happen to them.

One such example is Chapel court in Bush Hill Park in my constituency. Linkproud Ltd, Empress Management and the solicitors Paul Chevalier and Linda Malthouse deserve to have their names mentioned as much as possible, especially under the cover of parliamentary privilege in connection with their disgraceful activities. They have threatened and abused leaseholders and extorted money in the most disgraceful way. It should make us ashamed that our law allows people to behave in that way. They have used bullying tactics and threatened the full force of the law to try to seize properties when small parts of bills have not been paid, and have tried to load up mortgages behind home owners.

The *Evening Standard* in London has given publicity to that bunch of swindlers—that is the only thing that lawyers and solicitors protected by the Law Society can be called when they behave in this way. I am surprised that the Law Society, with its new management, has not decided to look carefully at the operations of swindlers who pretend to be respectable solicitors. I hope that the Law Society will try to redeem its reputation by looking into cases such as Chapel court.

I shall not detain the House, because other colleagues wish to speak today. It does not seem sensible to detain the Government in getting their act together any longer.

We have heard that other countries are perfectly capable of operating a system that is fair to home owners who want to own a flat. Australia, the United States and countries on the continent of Europe do so, as does Scotland. If Scotland can do it, surely England and Wales can get its act together and put matters right. I hope that we can. As an Englishman with a little Welsh blood, I do not like to see the Scots getting away with it. The Scots can be insufferable when they have got things right. The Scots can be insufferable anyway, as anyone can, but when they have got it right they are even worse, because we know that we should be doing the same as them.

I hope that, when the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) speaks on behalf of the Labour party today, he will give a commitment that Labour will support the measure and give full backing to the Government either by supporting the Bill today or by coming back as soon as possible with their own suggestions. The Government should do so before a general election. Opposition Members' reasons for wanting to reform the law are just as honourable as ours and they believe just as sincerely as we do that the law must be changed. There is cross-party feeling in the House that something must be done. We do not want to have to come back in the new Session to ask why commonhold is not included in the Queen's Speech. It must be included.

It has been shown that it is easy to introduce commonhold and that it is not controversial. We are not confiscating freeholders' rights. Commonhold is an alternative. If they wanted to, freeholders could sell their rights by agreement to existing leaseholders and form commonhold associations. We are not expropriating anything from anyone. We are trying to set a fair system for land tenure that encourages owner-occupation in our society and stakeholding—whatever we want to call it, it is a good thing, and we should all support it today.

1.33 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): I am grateful to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) for bringing this important measure to the House. I was impressed by the detail, care and attention that she has put into the arrangement of the clauses of the Leasehold (Reform) Bill. She must have spent much time on the minutiae of the Bill, for which we should all commend her.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), who was my Member of Parliament at one time, on having brought such a measure before the House on eight separate occasions. I only regret that he will not carry on, like Fox, to the 21st occasion, until he gets his Bill through. I commend him for his efforts and for his care and attention in trying to look after his constituents and other people who have been affected.

The hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) made a thoughtful speech, but tried—without great success—to turn this into a party political issue, which fortunately it is not. If he is so concerned about protecting tenants from large landowners, why did the Labour party oppose our home ownership policies when we tried to sell council houses to tenants? After all, we are the party of home ownership—the party that believes in people owning their own properties—and our record in the past 16 years or so has proved that. We have put about 3 million people in possession of their properties at the expense of some large owners—council landlords who have not looked after their tenants as well as they should.

I want my hon. Friend the Minister to take great note of the Bill. I hope that he will either support it today or bring forward similar legislation in the next Queen's Speech—certainly before the next general election, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) said. It is an important issue, both for the Conservative party and the people of Brentford and Isleworth, and it is, therefore, important for the Minister to assure us that it will be a matter of major legislation and concern for the Government before that election.

I have worked on behalf of leaseholders in my constituency, particularly those in Brentford dock, where tenants have had enormous problems because their freehold has been sold underneath them, so to speak, several times; they have reached the point where they do not know who owns it. They have also had problems with, among other things, service charges, management costs, repairs and lifts. That leads me to believe that commonhold is the way forward.

Commonhold is a freehold development in which two or more people can come together and form an association to achieve home ownership, which is an important consideration. I shall take this opportunity to explain in some detail how the system will work. A commonhold is a freehold development of two or more units which share services and facilities and so require a system for communal management and for the ownership of the common parts.

The promoter of a commonhold—the person who establishes it—might be the developer of a new development. Many new developments are being built, new properties are being taken up, construction is taking place and the economy is reviving. Today, interest rates came down, which means that more properties will be purchased. People will want to go into the market and buy—the market is reviving. Not only the Conservative party but the Labour party should encourage that trend, and we should talk up the economy. I am rather disappointed by Labour Members, because they are always talking down the country. We want to revive confidence in the economy and the property market, and it is absolutely futile for the Labour party to talk it down, creating a sense of gloom where there is no gloom.

A block of flats is the most obvious example of a commonhold, in which the flats would be owned on a long leasehold basis. There would be nothing in commonhold legislation to prevent commonhold from being established for non-residential purposes. Equally, the system might be adopted for commercial or mixed-use developments, and the units would not have to be horizontally divided like flats. Therefore, the system could also be used for housing, industrial estates and even shopping precincts, with flats or offices above. It could also be applied to agricultural buildings and surrounding farmlands.

The owner of a commonhold flat or other unit—the unit owner—would, unless and until the commonhold was brought to an end, own the freehold in his unit. That ownership would automatically carry with it the right to essential passage—such as for access to gas, water and electricity—and the right to perform any communal service, such as for cleaning, maintenance, use of the

[Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva]

common parts and insurance of the structure. If a building had other communal facilities—such as parking, gardens or recreational facilities—the right to use them would go with the unit.

The commonhold association, for which the Bill provides, would be a corporate body established under the commonhold legislation and run exclusively by the unit's owners, who would then own and manage any common parts as well as the services and facilities. The commonhold association would have the benefit of a charge against each unit in respect of any arrears of service charge, to give it comparable protection to that which applies to service charges under current leases.

On the winding up of commonhold, the freehold in the individual units would automatically be transferred to the commonhold association, and the owner's right to his unit would be converted into a share of the association's net assets. The commonhold share would be calculated according to the proportions laid down for each unit when the commonhold was established. That arrangement would ensure that the value of the commonhold property, as a whole, could be realised by a single person, such as the liquidator of the association, thereby avoiding the problem that would arise if all unit owners continued to own their units.

I should like briefly to speak about the commonhold association. The commonhold system would include a self-contained scheme for the establishment, conduct and—in conjunction with the winding up of the commonhold itself—dissolution of the commonhold to run the commonhold. The corporate body would not be established under the Companies Acts, although similar procedures would apply where appropriate.

The creation of a corporate body would be considered appropriate for a number of reasons. The most important are: the aims of achieving a high level of standardisation; the fact that some of the more stringent requirements of the companies legislation are considered inappropriate to mutual organisations of that kind; and the restriction of the special rules about the liability of each individual, as we have seen in certain schemes set up under the Companies Acts and Friendly Society Acts.

This measure is long overdue. As many hon. Members have said in this debate, in some ways it puts right some of our more antiquated leasehold laws and brings a new form of common ownership into its own that is in keeping with the times and the conditions in which we live. More and more young people leave home and find jobs. They want to live by themselves until they get married and to have an equity stake in property. If they are allowed only leasehold tenure, as commonly happens, it will lead eventually to conflict, as has been explained. Commonhold, however, will enable young people in particular—those who are in the job market, especially in urban areas, and flat dwellers—to have a stake in common ownership. That is highly commendable and very much in line with the Conservative party's home ownership policy. I support the Bill.

1.44 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) on her success in the ballot and her decision to introduce a Bill on commonhold. We believe that commonhold is a key concept for future housing policy in Britain, and the hon. Lady has done the House a service by giving us an opportunity to debate it. She moved the Second Reading of the Bill with conviction, clarity and good humour, despite the frustration that she must have felt, sitting here earlier this morning watching the clock ticking away and thus watching its prospects of progressing beyond this place today fade, too.

We heard several valuable contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House, all of whom have direct constituency experience of the problems of leasehold tenure. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra), who stayed with us until literally a moment ago and then apologised to me and, I think, the Minister for the fact that he had to return to his constituency, made the case for a more far-reaching reform. Like many other hon. Members, he highlighted constituency examples of the injustices currently faced by leaseholders.

The hon. Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) started elegantly by admitting to eight previous attempts to introduce legislation on this subject. I acknowledge and pay tribute to his commitment over many years—like his distinguished predecessor in the Kensington seat, he has campaigned for leasehold reform and the introduction of commonhold. It is a sad comment on the reluctance of some people in his party to make progress that we are still debating the issue rather than seeing commonhold in effect. I hope that it is not that which explains his decision to leave Parliament at the coming election.

The hon. Member for Kensington asked about my party's approach to next year's legislative programme. I have great pleasure in assuring him that the Labour party will be only too pleased to introduce a comprehensive leasehold reform Bill in the next Queen's Speech.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) expressed disappointment with the failings of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 and articulated concern about the problems associated with leasehold tenure. He highlighted the case for more safeguards for leaseholders of councils and other social landlords, and I think that he was speaking for many hon. Members in doing so.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) made the case for sanctions against landlords' failure to offer first refusal to tenants under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987 and sought safeguards against forfeiture of the lease being used as a weapon to coerce leaseholders into paying extortionate service charges and repair costs. I think that he spoke for many people who have similar views.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) said that leasehold was simply an inadequate form of tenure and that he was looking to commonhold as a new form of tenure that he saw as a replacement for leasehold. I shall have more to say about that in due course.

The hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) also highlighted the extent to which leasehold was not working. He gave several examples of the problems confronting leaseholders and the potential abuse of the system. Rather intriguingly, he referred to the dangerous political consequences of not acting to remedy wrongs against leaseholders. Given the size of his majority, I am sure that he has every reason to raise that concern.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), after making some rather over-optimistic comments about the state of the housing market—views which will not, I suspect, be shared by the millions trapped in negative equity or the 1,000 households a week which are losing their homes through repossession—gave us the benefit of his views on the complex arrangements for the establishment of commonhold associations and on other aspects of the Bill. He ended intriguingly by arguing the case for common ownership and associating it with Conservative party policy. I shall not explore that concept any further, as those with a long memory on the subject will know that it could possibly bring us into interesting territory.

As is widely known, England and Wales are almost unique in the world in retaining a system of leasehold tenure for residential lettings. The system has many drawbacks: it gives unique advantages to landowners, who are able to accumulate and retain substantial property holdings while securing repeated capital gains through the sales of new leases as the old ones come to the end of their term. The leaseholder bears most of the costs of maintaining and improving the fabric of the property while the freeholder benefits from that investment. Not surprisingly, leaseholders have increasingly protested when the odds appear to be weighted so unfairly against them and in favour of landowners.

In recent years, there has also been growing evidence of disgraceful abuses of the leasehold system by some unscrupulous freeholders and their managing agents. They have sought to pressurise and intimidate leaseholders, with threats of large service charges or repair costs, into meeting unreasonable demands or forfeiting their lease. The *Evening Standard* and its assiduous property correspondent, Mira Bar Hillel, deserve praise for exposing those shameful malpractices and for pressing the case for further leasehold reform.

A series of leasehold reform Acts has been passed by the House. The most effective by far, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall stressed, was the Leasehold (Reform) Act 1967, which gave leaseholders in houses the right to buy out the freehold of their homes. It saved many thousands of leaseholders from the prospect of homelessness as their leases came to an end. It ensured an orderly transfer of large numbers of leasehold houses into the freehold tenure—the natural tenure for owner-occupation.

Subsequent leasehold reform measures have focused primarily on the position of leaseholders in flats, but they have, sadly, proved less successful than the 1967 Act. The Landlord and Tenant Acts of 1985 and 1987 were supposed to give redress to leaseholders against unreasonable demands by the freeholder and against the inefficient or incompetent management of their blocks. The Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 was supposed to give leaseholders in flats a similar right to enfranchise their homes as the 1967 Act had given to leaseholders in houses.

All three Acts have failed to make a substantial impact. Landlord abuse remains rife, as the antics of Messrs. Bebbington and their colleagues Malthouse Chevalier and Co. have revealed. Those abuses have rightly been exposed by the *Evening Standard*. The sanctions supposedly available in the 1967 Act proved hopelessly cumbersome and ineffective—as the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet highlighted in his speech. We have also seen how, in the past year, a large landowner, Smith's Charities, was able to sell a substantial estate over the heads of its leaseholders, with impunity and without offering the leaseholders first refusal. Ministers have been unable to point to a single case of leaseholders securing effective remedies through the 1987 Act.

At the same time, the number of leaseholders in flats who have succeeded in buying the freehold of their homes has been small. The restrictive rules of the 1993 Act—which reflected, more than anything else, the influence of large landowners in ensuring that the Act was not effective—together with the costs of the process, which can be high, and the unbelievably byzantine rules that have to be circumnavigated by any leaseholder aspiring to acquire the freehold of their block, have provided all too many opportunities for reluctant landlords to frustrate the aspirations of leaseholders. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) highlighted in his short intervention, as we warned as the 1993 Act was passing through Parliament, those loopholes and problems have prevented leaseholders from obtaining, on any significant scale, the benefits of enfranchisement that they were promised.

Why have all the measures failed? The answer is not hard to find, and I have already hinted at it. It lies in the uncomfortably ambivalent attitude of the Government and the Conservative party towards leasehold reform. Ministers know that a radical reform package to give leaseholders effective redress against landlord abuse and the right to buy their homes is necessary. However, as Ministers remain beholden to the big landed interests, they have not been willing to give leaseholders simple, effective and cheap remedies or to introduce simple machinery to enable leaseholders to buy their freehold at a fair price.

I am afraid that the surrender to the big landowners' interests in the Leasehold (Reform) Act 1993 was a sad example of those influences stopping a process that everyone in the leasehold field believed was right. The concessions that were made to the big landowners during that Bill's progress through Parliament produced a bureaucratic nightmare of red tape and hidden loopholes, with endless scope for escalating costs to frighten off all but the most determined leaseholder.

What ought to be done to assist leaseholders? The Labour party published its proposals for leasehold reform last October in a policy paper entitled "An End to Feudalism". The proposals set out in that paper included, first, the introduction of commonhold as a new form of tenure for home owners living in flats. I do not claim any originality in this regard—this is a tenure that is widely welcomed by people across the political spectrum; indeed, it was contained in the manifestos of the Labour party and the Conservative party at the last general election.

Secondly, we advocated the simplification of the enfranchisement rules to make it easier for leaseholders to buy out the freehold of their homes. Thirdly, we argued for a fairer and simpler valuation procedure to cut unnecessary costs and to safeguard leaseholders from unreasonable demands from the freeholder. Fourthly, we argued for a ruthless pruning of the complex red tape and the bureaucratic procedures implicit in existing legislation to make it easier for leaseholders to get through the process.

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Finally, we argued for effective remedies for leaseholders against landlord abuse, the charging of unreasonable service charges or costs for repairs, and inefficient management. We advocated the right to manage for leaseholders so that they could take over the management of their homes if they wished to do so. These proposals have been warmly welcomed by a large number of leaseholders who have responded to our consultation and we have no doubt that they form the basis for a fully effective leasehold reform package.

The introduction of commonhold as a new tenure for people living in flats is an important part of this package. Therefore, we obviously welcome the initiative of the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye in introducing her Bill. As she pointed out, although it is called the Leasehold (Reform) Bill, it establishes the concept of commonhold and does not set out proposals for the reform of leasehold. We support the concept of commonhold.

There is very little disagreement about the merits of a commonhold framework as against the existing leasehold system. As the hon. Lady explained in introducing her Bill, it enables people to own the freehold of their home while, at the same time, through the commonhold association owning a share in the freehold of the whole block. It gets rid of the need for a separate freeholder, and it gives the occupiers of the block proper control over the management of their homes.

Few people, other than those who hanker nostalgically for a feudal system of landholding or who have a vested interest in retaining the status quo, will object to the concept. Indeed, my only surprise today—which has been shared by a number of hon. Members who have spoken—is that it has taken so long for legislation to introduce commonhold to pass through the House. As I have already mentioned, there were unequivocal pledges to introduce commonhold in the 1992 Conservative party and Labour party manifestos. However, as with so many of the promises made in the Conservative party's 1992 manifesto, the pledge to introduce commonhold has not been honoured.

The hon. Lady has done her bit to try to rescue her party from the embarrassment that it must feel about this. She has arrived like a knight in shining armour at the eleventh hour, and she should be congratulated for that. Given the lack of parliamentary time available for consideration of a measure of this complexity and importance, one has to ask: why have the Government not introduced the Bill as a Government measure? One also has to ask: why are the Government not prepared now to give Government time for the Bill to enable it to progress further?

Ministers can hardly claim that they have not had time—the manifesto pledge to which I referred was made four years ago, and a draft Bill has been floating around in the Lord Chancellor's Department since at least 1990. Ministers cannot claim that other legislative measures have kept this measure out, as we have one of the lightest legislative programmes for many years. In addition, in this very light programme, we are currently considering two Bills on housing, either of which would have been a suitable vehicle for the Government to include commonhold measures if they had wished. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that, as with so many of the other leasehold reform proposals in 1985, 1987 and 1993, the Tory Government really do not have the political will to grasp the nettle.

If the concept of commonhold has such wide support, why have the Government been so slow? Apart from the usual forces of inertia, and reluctance to admit that anything can be better than the British tenure system—a reluctance that I fear is rather strong in the legal profession, and presumably is quite well entrenched in the Lord Chancellor's Department—I suspect that the main force for delay is the reluctance to grapple with the central issue of commonhold as a replacement for leasehold.

If commonhold is, as we believe it should be, a tenure that will take over within a relatively short period as the main form of tenure for people buying flats, there must be an effective mechanism to enable existing leaseholders to convert their leaseholds to commonhold. Such a mechanism would, however, once again threaten the vested interests of the big landowners. Is it therefore any surprise to see the outcome in the form of the Bill that we are debating today—I do not blame the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye, because she clearly inherited the Bill—ducking the issue of conversion from leasehold to commonhold?

The Bill essentially provides for the establishment of a commonhold framework in new developments where the occupiers agree a commonhold framework from the outset. The provisions of clause 6, which set out the initial conditions for establishing a commonhold, are clearly most easily met in the case of a new development. They appear to have been drafted with that prospect in mind. Conversely, when we look for the arrangements for conversion from leasehold to commonhold, it appears from subsections (3) and (4) of clause 8 that that will be possible only where 100 per cent. of the occupants of the block, and indeed 100 per cent. of those holding any interest in the block, are in favour.

I would welcome confirmation from the Minister on whether my interpretation of those provisions are correct. If it is, it will be difficult for leaseholders in existing leasehold properties to meet that condition. It only requires one occupier in the block, perhaps an elderly person who simply does not want the hassle of a change of tenure, to put an insurmountable obstacle in the way of establishing a commonhold.

More to the point, it provides an easy loophole for any freeholder who wants to prevent his leaseholders from being able to convert to the commonhold tenure. All that that freeholder has to do is to retain just one room in the block, even if that constitutes one hundredth or one thousandth of the total accommodation, or to let it on an assured shorthold tenancy. That is all that is required to frustrate the hopes of all the other leaseholders in the block to convert to commonhold. That cannot be right.

Once the commonhold has been established, the provisions of clause 8(7), as I understand them, allow major decisions affecting the commonhold to be taken provided they command the support of 80 per cent. of the units in the commonhold. That sensible measure is designed to prevent a single or unrepresentative voice from preventing the commonhold association from managing its affairs expeditiously. There may be questions about the choice of the 80 per cent. figure as the threshold. That could create problems, for example, in

a block of four flats where just one occupant would retain a veto over the actions of the other three. The principle of a threshold below 100 per cent. must, however, be right.

As I understand the Bill, however, the option for overriding a simple or unrepresentative objection does not apply before the commonhold is established. That will come as a severe disappointment to many leaseholders who would like to convert to commonhold.

Chas Johnson of CARLA—the Campaign against Residential Landlord Abuse—which has done so much in recent months to support and mobilise leaseholders who have been the victims of unscrupulous landlords, has written to me to say that the Bill does nothing to deal with the existing leasehold system and merely provides an alternative in the form of commonhold. He writes:

"Commonhold as an optional alternative is of no real use. As a mandatory form of tenure for new and converted multi let residential property in the future (with the abolition of leasehold) it would provide an elegant form of property ownership and would be welcomed. If it is to be an option then clearly the rogues who work the leasehold scams will be more than happy to opt for leasehold."

This dilemma is at the heart of the Bill. If it is an option only for new developments, it will play only a marginal role for many years, and may never replace leasehold as the main form of tenure for flat owners.

A more effective measure allowing scope for easy conversion from leasehold, and with the clear objective of replacing it within the reasonably near future, will clearly be necessary, but, of course, that threatens the vested interests of the big landowners, and the Government are clearly not prepared to take on those interests.

David Marcus, a partner in Franks, Charlesly and Co., and widely recognised as one of the country's leading experts on leasehold and related matters, makes the same point. He writes:

"I think all those in favour of commonhold have been working on the basis that it will be a substitute for the leasehold system; this Bill is drafted on the basis that it will be an alternative system; frankly I cannot see that unless it is made compulsory that it will have any effect. It is a completely new system and I cannot see that any of the large landlords will be prepared to accept it unless they are compelled to do so. My scenario would be that it would be compulsory after a particular period of time. Once the major house builders start adopting it then a lot of others will follow in their footsteps."

Mr. Deva: The hon. Gentleman says that the Conservative party is against the measure because it does not want to upset large landlords. But as the scheme is voluntary, how can the hon. Gentleman make that assumption?

Mr. Raynsford: Plainly, the hon. Gentleman has not been listening closely to what I have said: the Conservative party is not prepared to introduce a scheme involving an element of compulsion which will enable leaseholders to transfer from existing leasehold properties to commonhold properties, because that would threaten large landowners to whom the hon. Gentleman's party is still financially beholden.

David Marcus makes another valid point about the lack of reference to experience elsewhere. In Australia, the strata title system has been operating for many years with considerable success. One had hoped that those responsible in the Lord Chancellor's Department for drafting proposals for the commonhold system, which operates on similar principles to strata title, would look closely at the Australian experience.

One of the conclusions to be drawn from that experience is that an appropriate body to provide advice and help with the resolution of disputes about the establishment and operation of strata titles is essential. I can see no provision in the Bill for such a service, and the only body that provides expert specialist advisory services in this field, the Leasehold Enfranchisement Advisory Service, has no guarantee of funding beyond the end of this year. I hope that the Minister will tell the House how he expects the need for advice and assistance on the resolution of disputes will be handled. I assume that his Department would neither welcome nor be equipped to handle the scale of inquiries that are likely if commonhold takes off as a viable tenure. The Australian evidence suggests a figure of about 20,000 inquiries a year on issues relating to strata title.

Clauses 3 and 5 give the Lord Chancellor's Department extensive powers to make rules and regulations. Although it may be sensible to have some of the detailed provisions—in particular, those regulations that may need to be varied in the light of experience—made by order rather than included in primary legislation, that in itself has probably helped to keep the Bill down to a manageable size compared to some of its draft predecessors. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to have an indication of how these powers will be used. Will the Minister outline the scope and main features of the commonhold constitution rules that will be made under the provisions of clause 3 and of the regulations that may be made under clause 5?

Will the Minister clarify one of the provisions in clause 16 on the recovery of service charges? That clause specifies that service charges are recoverable from the owner of a commonhold unit, or from the person who is registered as the owner where ownership has not yet been changed on the register, or from the person who is a tenant under a long lease of the unit.

Although I understand the first two provisions, which cover the owner or the previous owner, I am puzzled by the reference to a leaseholder. As I have stressed, the Bill appears to require 100 per cent. unanimity before a commonhold can be set up and specifies that only owners of units within the commonhold can be members of the commonhold association.

How, then, do leaseholders come into picture? If it were possible to convert from leasehold to commonhold with less than 100 per cent. participation, we could envisage circumstances in which some residual leaseholders might remain, but that is not provided for in the Bill. If the Bill envisages the prospect of leaseholds being created by owners of commonhold units, surely, over time, that should undermine the integrity of the commonhold. I would welcome clarification on that point.

We would want to consider further other points of detail if the Bill were to progress to Committee, but I fear that that will not happen. Although the Bill is welcome in so far as it raises the issue of commonhold—a form of tenure that we view as an appropriate framework for home ownership in flats—unfortunately, as presently drafted, it is not the right way forward if we want to open the door to a significant number of commonholds.

[Mr. Raynsford]

The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye should be congratulated on having raised the issue. In doing so, she has helped to reinforce the case for a thoroughgoing range of leasehold reform measures. Unless substantially amended, however, the Bill would not be the right vehicle in the long term for a thriving and successful commonhold sector, replacing leasehold as the main tenure for owner-occupied flats.

We must wait for the return of another Government, with a real appetite and commitment to leasehold reform, to ensure not just appropriate commonhold measures that will allow the tenure to become the norm and to replace leasehold, but more thoroughgoing and effective remedies for leaseholders who have suffered too many abuses under the current system.

2.10 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Jonathan Evans): In the short time that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) has left me to respond to the debate, I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) not just on her success in introducing this important matter today, but on the manner and content of her speech. She demonstrated that, in dealing with complex property law issues, she had a command of detail and could convey the essence of the Bill's proposals. I commend her for that.

I was pleased to note that speeches were made by a number of my hon. Friends. They included my hon. Friends the Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn), for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon), and for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva).

I wish especially to single out my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington. He referred to his illustrious predecessor, Sir Brandon Rhys Williams. I am pleased that the bouquet was given to Sir Brandon. My hon. Friend will be unaware that my first experience in politics was as a schoolboy campaigning for Sir Brandon when he fought against Michael Foot in the by-election following the death of Aneurin Bevan. Sir Brandon played an immense part in the House. My hon. Friend has lived up to that in his time here.

Let me make the Government's position clear. They are firmly committed to the implementation of commonhold. As my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor reaffirmed in the other place less than two weeks ago, it remains our firm intention that appropriate legislation should be introduced as soon as possible. Before I outline the steps that are being taken to advance the implementation of commonhold, it would be helpful to remind hon. Members of some of the background to the issue, most especially because of some of the comments on the period that has elapsed since the concept was first introduced.

In a nutshell, the purpose of commonhold is to provide owners in multi-occupier developments with the means of owning the freehold interest in their homes and, at the same time, to furnish them with a system for the efficient management of the development. That will have the dual advantages of affording owners a measure of control and security that is often believed to be lacking in long leasehold developments, although avoiding the difficulties of so-called "flying freehold" schemes. The emphasis of the commonhold system will be on co-operation between owners in the development that forms the commonhold. So long as the commonhold continues, the owner of each unit is the freeholder, and the commonhold will be managed by an association comprising the unit owners.

The commonhold association will own any common parts and will be responsible for their repair and maintenance. That will be financed by a service charge payable by the unit owners. In certain circumstances, it will be possible to bring the commonhold to an end, in which case the ownership of the unit will automatically be converted into a share, fixed in advance, of the ownership of the entire property within the commonhold. Statutory rules will govern the conduct of the commonhold association and the rights and obligations of the unit owners in relation to each other.

Clearly, the success of any multi-occupied building or development will depend on the existence of a satisfactory and enforceable regime of mutual rights and obligations between the people who live in it. However, that is not provided by the present law governing the ownership of freehold land. It is, of course, possible for the subdivision of a building to be organised by means of a leasehold structure, and there are doubtless many developments that operate on a perfectly satisfactory basis, especially where the tenants also have effective control of the freehold estate by means, for instance, of a jointly owned management company.

Neither commonhold nor any other form of land tenure will ever eradicate the possibility of disputes between neighbours, as we have been reminded during the debate. However, commonhold can have considerable advantages over the leasehold system.

The first and most obvious advantage of the commonhold system is that it will enable people to own the freehold in their homes in developments that would otherwise necessitate a leasehold structure. People naturally resent what they regard as the temporary nature of ownership that a lease confers in a property for which they regard themselves to have paid full value—an observation made by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East. People also resent having to pay a ground rent, which may be high, seemingly for nothing. In addition, there is no such thing as a standard lease. The wide variation in lease terms presents pitfalls and uncertainties for an intended purchaser, and does nothing to simplify or reduce the cost of conveyancing.

Furthermore, a lease is a declining asset and leases that are coming towards their expiry cease to be mortgageable. The security of a building society or of any other lender ultimately rests on its ability to sell the mortgaged property and to recoup the amount owing to it. Lenders rightly act with caution in advancing mortgage funds. Typically, a lease that has less than 40 to 45 years to run will frequently not be regarded as satisfactory security for a loan. It also follows that, where a lease is nearing expiry, the value of the interest that it confers will diminish. Those problems will not apply to the ownership of a unit that is a commonhold.

A further advantage is that the commonhold system will automatically provide a statutory framework of rights and obligations which is directly enforceable by and

against each unit owner in the commonhold and which will be standard from one commonhold to the next. The unit owner's position will no longer depend on the vagaries of the terms of the lease under which the property is held or on the willingness of the landlord to co-operate in enforcing the unit owner's rights.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye has pointed out, one major problem with leases is that important decisions on repairs and on the provision of services are often left in the hands of landlords whose interests may be opposed to the interests of the tenants. That tension can be exacerbated, especially when the financial value of the landlord's interest in the building is negligible when compared with that of the tenants. As we have heard, there have been a number of well publicised cases. I will not go over them now, because they have been touched on by so many of my hon. Friends and by the hon. Member for Greenwich.

The Government are acutely aware of the problems that can be caused by bad landlords. For the future, the problem would be addressed by a commonhold system which would put the management of property in the hands of a democratically run commonhold association. In those circumstances, the interests of the unit owners and the commonhold association would clearly be identical. In addition, the requirement for fundamental decisions affecting a commonhold to be made unanimously will protect the interests of minorities. That has, of course, to be subject to certain measured provisions to prevent the operation of the commonhold from being thwarted by a few recalcitrant unit owners.

The Government also recognise that the problems caused by the abuse of the leasehold system by bad landlords have to be tackled immediately for the protection of existing tenants. It is not merely enough to rectify the problem for future generations by enacting legislation on commonhold. To that end, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has brought forward a package of additional rights for tenants in the Housing Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet asked when my right hon. Friend would be dealing with the detail of the five proposals that he intends to bring forward. It is my understanding that my right hon. Friend intends to table those amendments in Committee. We therefore do not have very much longer to wait.

The genesis of commonhold can be traced back at least as far as 1965, when the Wilberforce committee on positive covenants affecting land recommended the introduction of an optional basis for new, large, multiple developments of a modified strata title system, similar to what had been introduced a few years earlier in New South Wales.

Matters developed further in 1984, when the issue was referred to the Law Commission. In its report "The Law of Positive and Restrictive Covenants", it recognised that the law is defective in imposing mutually enforceable property rights and obligations. The law allows only restrictive covenants to be enforced between successors in title of the original landowners, and there is no direct way in which to enforce positive covenants, such as rights of support or an obligation to keep a fence or a wall in repair.

Those problems are of course accentuated in blocks of flats, where each flat often depends on its neighbour for support and shelter. The very stability of the building depends on proper maintenance and repair of the individual flats and the common parts.

The commission recommended the creation of a new interest in land—the land obligation—that is capable of subsisting as a legal interest like an easement, and which would impose a burden on the owner of one piece of land, either for the benefit of the owner of another piece, or as part of a development scheme. Those recommendations were accepted by the Government, then superseded to an extent by the commonhold proposals that were put forward, and therefore required some substantial revision to take account of the fact.

The commission recommended the adoption of some form of condominium legislation similar to that in America, Australia and various other jurisdictions. In response to the report, the Government established an interdepartmental working group, under the chairmanship of a law commissioner, to produce proposals for similar legislation in England and Wales. It reported in July 1987 and recommended commonhold as a new way in which to own property.

In fact, the Lord Chancellor published for consultation a draft commonhold Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington said, which the Law Commission had prepared. Following the favourable responses that he received to the general principles, he announced the Government's intention to bring forward the necessary legislation.

The original draft of the Bill was, however, incomplete in various respects, and that is no secret. It has become clear in this debate that specific problems need to be addressed in many areas. The implementation of commonhold will mark a major milestone in the development of property law. The Government are determined that their proposals are implemented on the basis of technically sound legislation that will provide a firm bedrock for the establishment of what will amount to an entirely new system of land tenure. For that reason, the Government have not seen fit to proceed with their proposals until the draft legislation has been fully thought through and reworked to make it as effective as possible.

It is especially necessary in property law reform to ensure that the details of legislation are correct, since it may be very many years before land tenure problems become apparent. By the time that the need for reform manifests itself, the job of rectifying the problems without unravelling the complex arrangement of rights and obligations based on the original legislation will have become a major undertaking. That is even more important when the reforms concern people's ownership of their own homes.

The great property law reforms of 1925 illustrate how long major pieces of property legislation may be expected to last. Indeed, it is a tribute to the thoroughness with which the 1925 legislation was prepared that so much of it is still in force today, although a Government Bill is going through the House at the moment to adjust arrangements for trusts for sales of land.

Mr. Raynsford *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I know that my hon. Friend wants the Government's full response. In fairness, the hon. Gentleman cut into my time to some extent.

The benefits of our approach can be seen in the steady and continuing progress on property law reform over past years. All measures have proceeded, or are proceeding,

[Mr. Evans]

with general support. That is in large part due to the lengthy consideration that they received before they were introduced into Parliament. Proposals that eventually found fruition in the Landlord and Tenant (Covenants) Act 1995 were transformed through that process from matters of deep controversy to a measure supported by all political parties and a wide range of interests of all sizes and types in the property industry.

I was hoping that during the debate we would see consensus across the Floor of the House on the need to proceed with commonhold. As anyone who has considered the original draft Bill will be aware, the aims and purposes of commonhold can be stated easily enough but the legislation required to implement the scheme will necessarily be complex.

I shall explain the reasons for the necessary complexity. Before I move on from the original consultation on commonhold, however, I should say something about one of the issues at the forefront of the consultation exercise. I refer to the circumstances in which conversion to commonhold will be compulsory.

The Government's consultation paper was issued prior to the enactment of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. That measure fully implemented the Government's proposals for a leasehold enfranchisement scheme. It enabled tenants to acquire collectively the freehold of the building in which their flats were situated. When the proposals for commonhold were first mooted, they were closely associated with leasehold enfranchisement. Indeed, I expect that, following the implementation of commonhold, the two schemes will be complementary. However, commonhold is to be a stand-alone scheme.

In implementing commonhold, the Government have no plans to extend the right of tenants compulsorily to acquire the freehold of their buildings. To attempt to do that and to re-open the issue of leasehold enfranchisement in that way would, in our view, muddy the waters and introduce unnecessary controversy into the implementation of a reform that I believe is supported on both sides of the House. That point has been made with some force by my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington. In that regard, he was absolutely right.

The implementation of commonhold will necessarily involve the passing of detailed technical legislation.

Mr. Raynsford: When?

Mr. Evans: It is not that the basic principles of commonhold are particularly difficult to define. I have indeed endeavoured to touch upon most of them.

The Bill makes a creditable attempt to cover the main planks of the scheme. The difficulty with legislation will be in ensuring that commonhold schemes—they will represent one of the most fundamental changes in property law—will work efficiently and fairly, and without anomaly, in the context of the greater mass of the law generally, and of property and company law in particular.

The newness of the concept of commonhold has great advantages but great care must be taken to ensure that it does not bring with it outweighing disadvantages. It is necessary to provide comprehensively for a system that is superior to leaseholds while things are going well and to ensure that the same system does not result in a worse situation if things go wrong.

In my view, most landlords are decent, honest and competent. The problems lie with those who have not become such, so as to require legislative intervention. Great care must be taken, therefore, to ensure that the commonhold scheme is able effectively to deal with bad cases. Commonhold should not be capable of being used a vehicle for fraud. Nor should it be possible for continuing incompetent or dishonest operations to be hidden from view in a commonhold association.

Propositions such as these are simple to state but great care will be necessary to put them into practice. We must ensure that legislation meshes with existing law, and that the necessary protections and safeguards are reproduced as required.

I am pleased to report to the House that my officials, with the assistance of officials from other interested Departments, have been engaged in detailed work on these matters for some time and are in the course of preparing a commonhold Bill that will set out the complete regime for implementing commonhold. I hope that it will be possible for the Bill to be published for consultation during the summer so that hon. Members and others will have the maximum opportunity to consider the Government's proposals in detail.

The Government are determined to proceed with their task of preparing commonhold for implementation and will introduce the new Bill as soon possible to ensure that this important reform reaches the statute book. The issues that are being addressed to prepare the new commonhold Bill include corporate status. One has only to consider the implications arising from the fact that commonhold associations will be corporate bodies with legal personalities quite distinct from that of their individual members. Commonhold associations will therefore be different from, for instance, residents associations in existing leasehold developments, while their corporate status would afford them significant advantages in managing—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 12 July.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

REGISTRATION OF IMMIGRATION ADVICE PRACTITIONERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 July.

ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 22 March.

INTEREST ON DEBTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Second Reading what day? No day named.

ENERGY CONSERVATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

WATER (CONSERVATION AND CONSUMER CHOICE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 22 March.

BRITISH TIME (EXTRA DAYLIGHT) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [26 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put,

That, at the sitting on Monday 11th March—

(1) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Welsh Business not later than Ten o'clock, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendments to the said Motion which she may have selected and which may then be moved; and

(2) Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates) shall apply with the insertion in line 41, after the words 'At Ten o'clock', of the words 'or immediately after the previous business has been disposed of, whichever is the later'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Hon Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed upon Monday next.

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 14th March, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community Documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Howard relating to Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first such Motion; and the said Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Local Government Spending (Lancashire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I am glad to have the opportunity to debate local government spending in Lancashire, and especially the lack of Government support. I am grateful for this chance to discuss the matter, especially after the Minister's answer to me on 27 February when, at the end, he said:

"If Labour councillors cannot manage, perhaps they should resign."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. 707.]

It is not the Labour councillors in Lancashire who should resign, but him and the Government. They should give the people the opportunity to elect a new Government—and the quicker the better.

When the Tory party was elected to office in 1979, it had said during the election campaign that it wanted to free town halls. Ever since they took office in 1979, the Government have shackled local government by their legislation, and even more by the financial restraints that they have imposed. I refer particularly to Lancashire and its funding, but what I shall say applies to almost every council in the country.

Before I came to the House, I was a member of Burnley borough council, first as chairman of finance and then as leader of the council. I used to think that the position could not get worse, yet, year after year, it gets worse. The best example of saying one thing when not in office and doing another when in office is what the Tory party has done to local government.

Although today I shall concentrate on revenue spending, similar arguments apply to capital spending. The local education authority has no capital available to build or repair schools. Councils do not have the money to build urgently needed housing to rent or to improve housing stock. We are seeing housing standards decline. What a dismal, appalling record of 17 years in office.

According to the Association of County Councils, in Lancashire the band D council tax—I will use band D as an example—in 1996-97 will increase from £528.35 to £557.49, an increase of 5.5 per cent. Yet at the same time, the council has had to cut the services it provides because of the Government's appalling national underfunding of local government. I argue that, in total, they underfunded local government by about £3.66 billion in 1996-97. If we examine that figure, we see that it is even below the current spending level. That is appalling.

For continuation of service at the present level, allowing for inflation and so on, Lancashire county council would have to spend £978.1 million. The standard spending assessment—the figure that the Government say the council should need to spend—is £889.5 million. The capping limit—the limit up to which it is allowed to spend—is £934.6 million. The difference between the continuation of service estimate and the capping limit imposed by the Government is £43.5 million.

Lancashire county council has no intention of breaking the law, so it has been forced to reduce its expenditure budget by that figure. It has done so by several means. It has reduced the services committee estimates by about £18.5 million. Library hours have been cut. It fought hard not to close any library, because it felt that that would be an appalling thing to do. Cuts have been made in museums and the arts, and some £6 million has been cut from social services, which are absolutely crucial. We have had to cut £9 million from our budget for repair and maintenance of roads and road building in the year ahead.

In order not to have to impose further cuts, the council has used balances and reserves and sold some assets. That has brought in £16 million. That sort of thing can only be done once. The council cannot keep selling assets. Once it has sold them, it does not have them to sell. What will it do in future years? If it has no balances left, it cannot use them again.

In the Budget this year, the Government announced that priority was to be given to schools. They said that it had been a tight expenditure round. I would have said that it was not just a tight, but an appalling, expenditure round.

Lancashire has given the £26 million provided for its schools to the delegated schools budget, and the primary and secondary schools' budgets have been increased by 5.1 per cent. So Lancashire has again conformed with the Government's view, but if it gives that money in the way that the Government wish, it has to make bigger cuts in other areas. That means that, within education, leaving aside the schools budget, items such as discretionary grants, youth services and so on have had to bear an even greater burden of cuts than would otherwise have been the case.

I have received today, purely by chance, a letter from Lancashire county council in response to a complaint from a Mrs. Gregory, who is one of my constituents. She is not the only person who has raised this issue. She is connected with the running of the girl guides and brownies in her part of Burnley. They now have to pay for the use of premises, because the county council can no longer provide funding. In this day and age, it is totally unacceptable if we have to make cuts that affect our young people in that way.

The district auditor said:

"the level of balances is as low as is prudently acceptable"

in Lancashire. The estimated balance of the county fund at 1 April 1996 will be £14.2 million, falling to £8.5 million at the end of the current financial year on 31 March 1997, which is less than 1 per cent. of 1996-97 net expenditure. The district auditor believes that that is the prudent minimum that the county needs to keep in its reserves and balances.

In a report to Parliament on 30 November 1995, Lancashire education authority was shown to spend 1.5 per cent. on administration, which is well above the average in efficiency and, again, shows how well the county council is run. Lancashire continues to have the support of the district auditor. In his latest management letter, published recently, he said:

"Prudence and accountability have been features of the financial arrangements in the County Council for many years. This tradition of excellence continues despite the challenges of the present financial constraints."

He also said:

"We remain content that the overall management arrangements of the Lancashire County Council are sound and that a healthy culture exists within the County Council for the achievement of economy, efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery."

We also note that, in 1995-96, central administration in Lancashire is 1.87 per cent. of the potential schools budget, against an average for county councils as a whole of 2.09 per cent. and an average of 2.22 per cent. in all local education authorities. Again, that shows that Lancashire county council is not top heavy in administration, but keen to provide the services to the people of the county that are so essential—services that it was elected to provide.

With spending at 5.1 per cent. above standard spending assessment, Lancashire has one of the highest spends above SSA of all the shire counties. That largely results from the inadequacies of the SSA system, and the Government need to deal with it. It also results from the high needs of the county. I stress to the Minister that he must consider county councils that have particular needs. In Lancashire, our needs are due to deprivation, poverty, low wages, unemployment, and, in many parts of the county, the industrial heritage that has left us with dereliction that must be cleared as we go forward to the 21st century.

The area cost adjustment overstates the cost differential between the south-east and the rest of the country. By rectifying that discrepancy, the county council would, in our view, gain about £9 million in standard spending assessment. I am sure that the Minister will say that the Government are reviewing that. I know that it is being reviewed, but we had the problem in 1995, and we will have it in 1996-97. He knows that, whatever the review yields—he does not know what the outcome will be, any more than I do—and even if it is favourable in the way that I would wish, it will not solve this year's problems, nor those of the new financial year, which starts in a few weeks.

I shall give one example of what the area cost adjustments will mean for education. Schools in Essex have been provided with an SSA of £2,055 per primary school pupil and £2,791 per secondary school pupil. The comparative figures for Lancashire are £1,964 and £2,615 respectively. If one multiplies the number of children involved, one can see the vast difference in millions of pounds that it makes for Lancashire county council. We accept that some adjustment may need to be made for the London area, but we believe that the present adjustment is too high and needs to be reviewed—Lancashire should get more money as a result.

The Government's assumption that authorities generate interest payment receipts in relation to their size is flawed. Consequently, the Government over-estimate Lancashire's ability to generate revenue receipts by approximately £4 million, resulting in a reduction in the standard spending assessment.

Lancashire has an acute need for more money. It believes in the provision of services. I am sure that the Minister will recognise that, for county councils, the most expensive services to provide are education and social services. That would be so whichever party was in office. I know that, before he was elected to the House, the Minister—like me—had experience in local government, which is extremely useful for any politician.

Education and social services are expensive because they are both labour-intensive and crucial. Social services deal with people in need, whether they be elderly or disabled, and education services cater for young children whose start in life is the biggest investment we can make in the nation's most important asset for the future.

Lancashire needs more money from the Government, and we need it now. We need a fairer settlement, and a Government who believe in local government. There needs to be an end to capping. I have always accepted, and have said many times, that the Government, of whichever party, have the right to determine in Parliament what resources they will make available to local government. People may argue that the funds made available are insufficient, but I accept that, at the end of the day, the Government have the final say.

In my view, the Tories have failed local government and Lancashire. More than anything, we need a Labour Government as soon as possible, because the Tories cannot respond positively and make more funds available.

2.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) for giving me the opportunity to discuss Lancashire's needs as he sees them. It is interesting that his attitude represents the cobwebs of old Labour being drawn back over the new Labour breath of fresh air. His is the classic old labour approach—judging quality by the amount of other people's money being spent.

In a way, I am sorry for the hon. Gentleman's constituency. As I said in answer to his parliamentary question of about 10 days ago, to which he referred, the difficulty is that his constituents have a Labour county council; the hon. Gentleman's other difficulty is that the district county council—Burnley—is also run by Labour. The only thing that is saving many of the people in the area, perhaps through capping alone, is that they have a Conservative Government.

The Government have pushed councils such as Lancashire into recognising value for money, although the councils have been pulled down this road kicking and screaming. Compulsory competitive tendering was anathema to them, but it ensures better services and better value for money. The Audit Commission was introduced by the Government to improve value for money and standards. Those concepts were resisted, but are now slowly being taken on board, by so-called new Labour.

In terms of our general funding for 1996-97, Lancashire compares favourably with the other shire counties. On a comparative basis, Lancashire's standard spending assessment has increased by 3.1 per cent.

Many local authorities draw up a wish list, and we heard a bit of that today. Authorities add new demands, but someone ends up having to pay, be it the general taxpayer or the local council tax payer. Someone has to put up the money to fund the demands if they are accepted. The Government have sought to put an end to that approach once and for all.

We must recognise the importance to the economy of the way in which local authorities spend their finances. Approximately 25 per cent. of Government expenditure is local government expenditure. It is just as important for local government to squeeze effectiveness out of every drop of other people's money spent as it is for central Government. Local authorities must consider that point and take account of it.

They must realise that they can squeeze full value out of every pound they spend; they must be more effective, and they must provide better services. It is an old, but

[Sir Paul Beresford]

true, local government motto that the authorities exist to provide more and better services for less cost. That can be done—I know that it can be done, and so does the hon. Gentleman: it is a case of "More, better, for less". But that attitude is not being shown by the hon. Gentleman's local council of Burnley.

I understand that Burnley borough council is getting a reputation for being top heavy. I was given the example of an anti-poverty officer who earns £30,000 a year, which is a burden on the poorer people of the area. An equal opportunities officer was appointed; the post turned into a department with its own sub-committee. As a result, the band D tax level has risen from £87.13 three years ago to £143.99 now—an increase of 65 per cent. in three years. That is inefficient.

Other forms of inefficiency have been shown to me. I understand that Lancashire county council is on course to underspend by £3 million on home helps and related services. It has been calculated that the county's residential and non-residential care service—because it is in-house—costs £15 million a year more than if it was in the private sector.

Every district auditor's management letter is a curate's egg. We have heard about the good parts from the hon. Gentleman,, but the district auditor has also reported that sickness among employees is costing the council £12 million a year. That matter should be looked into and sorted out.

The county council has formed an anti-poverty unit as part of its welfare rights committee. It has a starting budget of £100,000 a year, which would pay for 16,000 more home help hours. But the unit is nothing more than a talking shop.

Mr. Pike: Does not the Minister understand that Lancashire county council pays so much attention to poverty because such a high percentage of our people work in Burnley and Lancashire for less than £80 a week? That is a poverty wage; it is appallingly low pay; it is scandalous slave labour.

Sir Paul Beresford: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is right with his figures, but it ill behoves local authorities to load people with extra taxes when they could do more, better, for less. It would be better to look into ways of providing better services for less cost.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted particular issues; each local authority has its own problems. He and I know that, because we have both been keen members of local authorities. It is possible to do something about providing individual services in a better way, but it is not right for the hon. Gentleman or me to participate in individual discussions about them.

Burnley ranks 33rd out of 274 shires in terms of SSA distribution. Lancashire is right at the top: it ranks fifth out of 35. Its SSA went up by 3.1 per cent. this year, and its SSA per head went up by 2.8 per cent. this year. Its education SSA went up by 5.1 per cent. this year. If other local authorities can manage, Lancashire can and should. If the controlling Labour party in Lancashire cannot deal with the issues, it should resign and let someone else take over.

Every year, we have to set the demands of local authorities in the context of what the country can afford. Local government spending accounts for a quarter of all public spending, and no Government, of whatever political complexion, can afford to ignore it. Public spending decisions are made in the context of the financial strategy to promote sustained economic development and to ensure higher living standards overall. The best way to protect local government services is to ensure that the national economy is strong, and inflation is under control.

To this end, we must continue to seek better use of existing public spending and keep control of public wage bills, and both local government and central Government have an essential role to play in that. There is no doubt that there is still scope for increased efficiency in Lancashire. It can be done by efficiency, yet the hon. Gentleman referred to cuts. If a successful private business—the people who pay the council tax—can do it, it behoves the public authorities to do it as well.

We have ensured that local authorities have an opportunity to move within their budgets—they have been given the greatest of opportunity to move, except for one or two ring-fenced areas. The SSA is only a sign of what the Government feel is a means of breaking up the total expenditure available for local government as a whole. Within that, every local authority has the opportunity to move, to flex, to use different ways of approaching problems and to use private sector methods—including the private finance initiative, compulsory competitive tendering and other methods—to produce more and better services for less. Local authorities must be answerable to their electorates in the way in which they exercise their responsibilities.

It seems to me that Lancashire county council needs an education. Its budget for 1996-97 has been set at £935 million, an increase of 3.2 per cent. above the level of inflation. It is one of the highest spenders in the country, with a budget that is more than 5 per cent. above its SSA. Its council tax is £557 for a band D property, the second highest figure for a county council. Last year, the council reported that it would have to draw heavily on reserves to maintain services, and now it expects to add £7 million to its reserves during 1995-96. Despite that, the authority plans to increase its spending in 1996-97 by 4.2 per cent.

There is no doubt that this county could do better with its money. It is loading costs on its local community, and it is crying out for more central Government funding. To repeat what I said in answer to questions last week, the Labour councillors who are in control of the county are obviously not in control; they should stand down and let the Conservative councillors take over.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 11 March 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Oil Pollution

1. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ban single-hulled oil tankers from British waters. [17992]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): The Government have participated fully in amendments to international regulations, which will phase out the use of conventional single-hulled tankers over the next 30 years.

Mrs. Campbell: Why does the Secretary of State not start work now, through the International Maritime Organisation, to change the requirements for 30-year changes to tanker design? We need the world's tanker fleet to become safe as soon as possible. Thirty years is surely unacceptable.

Sir George Young: No country has banned the use of single-hulled tankers, but the hon. Lady will be pleased to hear that we have started with increased inspection of older ships. One must bear in mind the fact that 93 per cent. of the fleet have single hulls, so obviously there are constraints on the speed with which one can move to alternative use.

Mr. David Nicholson: In view of the enormous damage to wildlife and the immense cost that the recent Milford Haven upset has caused—I am thinking of the coasts of Cornwall and Devon as well as that of Wales—what urgent measures can my right hon. Friend pursue in the meantime, especially with regard to improving the training of tanker crews as there is some suggestion that badly trained crews have caused some of the mishaps?

Sir George Young: As my hon. Friend knows, the marine accident investigation branch is conducting an inquiry into the accident at Milford Haven. It will consider issues such as those that my hon. Friend rightly mentioned. It will be able to publish interim reports if lessons need to be learnt urgently, and one such special bulletin was published last week. The inquiry will cover the question of crew training.

Mr. Allen: In respect of the single-hulled Sea Empress, will the Minister ensure that the MAIB inquiry considers not only the advice given to Ministers about the incident but the responsibility that those Ministers must bear for having accepted in its entirety advice that was wholly and wildly optimistic?

The Minister failed to learn the lessons of the Braer disaster and the Brora disaster. Will he ensure that he learns the lessons of the Sea Empress disaster and that a tug is stationed in the western approaches at the earliest possible moment, and not in a year's time when the inquiry reports? Is there a tug in place in the western approaches today to prevent the possibility of a recurrence tonight of what happened to the Sea Empress?

Sir George Young: On the first point, the MAIB is independent of the Department of Transport. It has published reports which have criticised the Department and I have no doubt that it will criticise the Department in the future if it finds grounds so to do.

On the second point, lessons have been learnt from the Braer. There was a similar inquiry into that incident and then there was the Donaldson report, 86 recommendations of which have already been accepted.

Finally, as regards tugs, we accepted Lord Donaldson's recommendations that priority should be given to the Minches and the Dover straits. Tugs were stationed in those places straight away.

Civil Air Transport Regulation

2. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet European Transport Commissioner Kinnock to discuss the regulation of civil air transport in Europe. [17993]

Sir George Young: I met Mr. Kinnock on 5 February and discussed a number of matters, including civil air transport. No further meetings are planned at present.

Mr. Wilkinson: Given the evident inability of Commissioner Kinnock to regulate fair competition within the European Union, as evidenced by his accession to the Spanish Government's request to pump an extra £600 million or so into Iberia in addition to the large sum that they pumped in about five years ago, thus taking the figure well over £1 billion, will the Secretary of State go straight to Luxembourg and lodge an action with the European Court in view of the clear breach of article 92 of the treaty of Rome, which purports to ensure fair competition within the European Union?

Sir George Young: I agree with my hon. Friend that it was a disappointing decision which allowed Spain to subsidise Iberia to the tune of £566 million. It will distort competition and it is unfair to the United Kingdom airlines, which compete without subsidies. It is the second huge payment to Iberia in four years. We shall study the decision closely and consider carefully what options are available to us to take the matter further.

Public Transport Use

3. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what change in the level of use of public transport his Department forecasts for the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [17994]

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): The Government do not make forecasts of that sort.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that his answer is not helpful? Obviously, if there is to be an increase in the use of public transport, there needs to be major public investment. Does the Minister recognise the need to meet the requirements of the disabled who need to be able to get on and off public transport if they are to be able to use it? Investment is needed as soon as possible.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is right: my answer was not very helpful. His supplementary question, however, was based on at least two fallacies. It is not inevitable that large improvements in public transport need to depend on public subsidies; the case that he mentioned is evidence of that. Low-floored buses, which allow the disabled to gain access on the same basis as other people, are also useful to mothers with buggies or children, people with lots of shopping and those who do not walk or get about particularly well. Operators are finding that those buses pay for themselves. Private sector operators are happy to make that sort of investment.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Is my hon. Friend aware that buses are now reaching parts of my constituency of Chipping Barnet that it was never dreamt they could reach 10 years ago? Although I understand that 90 per cent. of passenger and freight traffic goes by road, does my hon. Friend agree that it is right that 75 per cent. of his Department's budget for London should be spent, as it is, on public transport services in our capital city?

Mr. Norris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right about the proportion of the Department's budget that is spent on public transport in the capital city. My hon. Friend is also right to state that buses provide the key to improving the public transport quality in an area such as the one that he represents. That is why my bus working group—which brings together operators, local authorities and officials from the Department—has been looking at ways to enhance the quality of bus services. In so doing, it has been able to achieve a remarkable degree of unanimity; there is agreement across the board that we need to make buses more attractive to more people so that they are used for more journeys.

Ms Short: Will the Minister explain why the Government attempted to keep hidden their own forecasts of road congestion, which the Royal Automobile Club describes as a

"nightmare vision of the future"?

Will he confirm that the maps predict chronic congestion and gridlock on increasingly large sections of the road network in the near future? Does he agree that the only way forward for the country is increased use of public transport, which will not come about with our deregulated and declining bus services with passenger miles decreasing and our fragmented rail services, which have resulted from privatisation and in which there has been underinvestment?

Mr. Norris: I appreciate that not many hon. Members visit the Library, but I would hardly call placing a document in the Library keeping it secret. The plans on congestion are straightforward: they show the congestion that will arise if the growth in transport is entirely unaffected by any Government action and if no more roadworks are carried out. The question is one for the hon. Lady, whose party is in a dreadful mess over the road-building programme. As that forecast is the inevitable and logical consequence of doing nothing to our road system, when will she and her party come off the fence and make it clear that we need a generous and vigorous road programme and that the Labour party's talk of cancelling or abandoning the road programme is utter nonsense?

London Underground Northern Line

4. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about progress in the supply of new trains for the Northern line. [17995]

Mr. Norris: The first of the trains will be delivered during 1996, and will come into service at the beginning of 1997.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for his progress report on the £1 billion investment in the Northern line, which constitutes the largest single private finance initiative project. He said that the first train would come into service early in 1997; can he and I agree to celebrate a happy new year on that first train on 1 January 1997?

Mr. Norris: Not necessarily on 1 January—I applaud my hon. Friend's enthusiasm, but I hope that he will not mind if I temper it slightly. I have every confidence that the new fleet of trains—delivered, as my hon. Friend pointed out, under the private finance initiative—will massively enhance the service offered to Northern line travellers; 50 per cent. of the current down time on the line is due to train faults, a problem that will be eliminated immediately by the introduction of this excellent new stock.

Ms Glenda Jackson: How confident is the Minister that the new trains will have a track worthy of their newness, given that large sections of the Northern line are having to be closed so that necessary repairs can be carried out? The need for those repairs is a direct result of the Government's failure to invest adequately in London Transport over the past 16 years.

Mr. Norris: I am very confident. It is extraordinary that the Labour party should wail about lack of investment, given that it invested only about a quarter of the amount that the Government are now investing. Now that we have launched a massive programme of investment to improve the Northern line, Labour Members have the sheer cheek to complain about the disruption that may be caused. Passengers see with their own eyes the improvements that are being made and they wholly reject the hon. Lady's thesis.

Mr. Dykes: Is my hon. Friend aware that many of my constituents travel on the Northern line from Edgware and Colindale stations? When the new trains start to run at the end of the year, will he ensure that their introduction is accompanied by improvements in infrastructure and electronic arrangements on the line as there have been many mistakes, failures and disappointments so far?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right: as well as introducing new trains, we need to give thought to signalling, power supply and track quality. We are already undertaking an extensive programme of refurbishment and improvement at stations so that we can improve the overall quality of the service offered to my hon. Friend's constituents. We are also looking for ways in which we can further harness private finance to make improvements at a rate that would not be possible if we relied solely on the taxpayer for funds. That is the key. We have the prospect of delivering £1 billion-worth of improvements to the Northern line, and the private sector can provide the vast majority of the money.

West Coast Main Line

5. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent on safety improvements on the west coast main line in 1995. [17996]

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): Railtrack's expenditure on renewal and maintenance of the west coast main line in 1994-95 totalled £129 million. Expenditure on safety cannot be identified separately. Expenditure by Railtrack and train operators provides a mixture of safety and other benefits.

Mr. Cunningham: Given events at the weekend—especially the smash in Staffordshire—does the Minister not think it about time that safety expenditure was separately identified, so that hon. Members could scrutinise it?

Is the Minister aware that there are frequent breakdowns on the Euston to Birmingham line? Last month there were delays of up to an hour and a half. Many passengers were stranded and had to get on the next train, where they found that there were no seats and became involved in rows with conductors about using first-class accommodation. Does the Minister consider that satisfactory?

Mr. Watts: Nearly all expenditure on improving and maintaining infrastructure has some safety benefits. That is why it is not possible to make the false distinction suggested by the hon. Gentleman. As for the west coast main line generally, the hon. Gentleman will know that Railtrack has a large investment plan, the first stage of which will be the letting of a contract to develop a new signalling system later this month.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend accept that the scene which resulted from the horrendous accident in my constituency of Stafford at the weekend was absolutely deplorable, that it was a miracle that lives were not lost on a substantial scale and that the proposal for an internal inquiry is wholly inappropriate? Does he agree that there should be a full and complete public inquiry to deal with all aspects of the accident, including not only safety issues but rail track, maintenance and planning considerations? Houses were immediately adjacent to a railway embankment and were therefore at very considerable risk.

Mr. Watts: First, I should like to extend my sympathy to my hon. Friend's constituents, particularly to the relatives of the postal worker who died in the crash. I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured to know that my right hon. Friend Secretary of State has asked the Health and Safety Commission to ask the Health and Safety Executive to carry out an independent investigation, to prepare a special report and for the report to be made public as soon as possible. In the meantime, Railtrack, the train operator and Her Majesty's railway inspectorate are carrying out technical investigations to see whether there are any immediate lessons to be learnt.

Mr. Chidgey: Does the Minister recall the derailment outside Euston station on 14 December last year, which led to widespread disruption and delay to train services? Will he tell the House why, despite earlier warnings from contractors about dangerous conditions on the track, Railtrack failed to take any action to prevent that accident, bearing it in mind that such negligent inaction by British Rail would have led automatically to dismissal of the staff concerned?

Mr. Watts: Railtrack already had plans for work on the track in the vicinity of Euston. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Health and Safety Executive issued an improvement notice—not a prohibition or closure notice—giving Railtrack a year to bring the track up to standard. There is no question that safety will be compromised.

Mr. Thurnham: Will the Minister give the House further details of the new investment in signalling equipment? Is not that investment very important and long overdue, and how long will it take to come into effect?

Mr. Watts: It is difficult to be precise about how long development of the new signalling system will take. The contract will be let later this month, which will add significantly to the line's capacity and provide inbuilt automatic train protection. In parallel with that development work, Railtrack will undertake a large investment programme in track and power supplies.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Minister knows that less than a fortnight ago the Health and Safety Executive issued a notice in relation to that particular area of the west coast main line, making it very clear that urgent and necessary work was required. It is a miracle that more Post Office workers did not lose their lives. Is it not clear from Railtrack's immediate response, which sought to give an instant diagnosis of the problem, that privatisation has fragmented companies and that, instead of improving safety for passengers, we have argument, disputation and real dangers to everyone using the system?

Mr. Watts: With regard to fragmentation, the hon. Lady knows that there will be a single rail network in the ownership and operation of Railtrack. I think that she and other hon. Members would be unwise to speculate on the causes of the accident.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Railtrack did.

Mr. Watts: The preliminary information from Railtrack's investigation team is that there is not yet any evidence of track defect, vandalism or signalling irregularity. The hon. Lady should be willing, as I am, to await the outcome of the independent investigation that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the Health and Safety Executive to carry out.

Ms Short: I am sure that the Minister would not mean to mislead the House. Does he agree that the improvement notice issued by the Health and Safety Executive to Railtrack about the incident at Euston is unprecedented and that an order of that kind was never necessary to make British Rail comply with safety conditions? Will the Minister confirm that the recent health and safety report on Railtrack was very critical indeed? Is he not concerned that Railtrack is so incompetent that it cannot give safety certificates for £450 million-worth of rolling stock that has already been bought but which is lying idle? Does he agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) that it is disgraceful that Railtrack should seek to absolve itself of responsibility for the terrible accident at Stafford before there has been an inquiry? Given all of that, does the Minister agree that it would be absolutely wrong to allow Railtrack to be floated before its safety standards have been sorted out?

Mr. Watts: No. The picture that the hon. Lady tries to paint is completely false. The HSE said that there is no decline in overall health and safety standards. Indeed, in terms of significant train accidents on the network, there was a fall of eight last year—to 110, with 32 fatalities, excluding trespassers and suicides, which is the lowest level ever. The true picture is quite different from that which the hon. Lady tries misleadingly to paint whenever she appears on television.

Motorway Repairs

6. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the speed with which motorway repairs are undertaken. [17997]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend receives representations from a range of individuals and organisations about the speed with which motorway repairs are undertaken.

Sir David Knox: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that motorway repairs are undertaken in the minimum possible time? Does he agree that hold-ups caused by motorway repairs are very costly to industry? Has he any proposals to speed things up?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right in that we can never be satisfied with the performance. The lane rental system has been introduced for virtually all major maintenance contracts and lane rental contracts are completed on average 30 per cent. faster than conventional contracts. As for the cost of delays, the use of lane rental has so far saved more than 5,000 days of disruption at an estimated saving of £120 million in road user costs since it was introduced in 1984.

Oil Pollution

7. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about progress to clear up oil deposits. [17998]

Sir George Young: I share the concern of people along the coast about the oil spilt when the tanker Sea Empress grounded at the entrance to Milford Haven. I am anxious that the beautiful and environmentally sensitive coastline should be quickly restored. Very good progress is being made with the clean-up. At sea, recovery of oil is effectively completed, and I expect that the work on the shoreline will be substantially completed by Easter.

Mr. Banks: We must not allow the public spotlight to move away from what looks like being perhaps the worst ecological disaster since the Torrey Canyon—*[Interruption.]* I think that "Tory" Canyon was the right pronunciation. Someone needs to swing for the current disaster. It cannot be acceptable for everyone to say, "It was nobody's fault." We want someone's head on a plate—or at least I do. Will the Secretary of State assure us that sufficient resources are still being made available for the clean-up operations and that the compensation fund is not likely to be exhausted? Can he give us any up-to-date figure for the extent of sea bird mortality in the area and also the number of sea mammals to have suffered as a result of the Sea Empress disaster?

Sir George Young: The Torrey Canyon disaster took place under a Labour Government, and the then Prime Minister ordered that the ship be bombed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that we have made considerable progress in dealing with such accidents since then.

With regard to the recent accident, the hon. Gentleman will know that I have established no fewer than three inquiries to find out exactly what went wrong. The inquiries will be independent and their findings will be published. There has been no shortage of resources for the clean-up process. I pay tribute to all the people involved in that process, both at sea and on the beaches, many of whom worked long hours in darkness doing a messy and uncomfortable task. I understand that the funds available will be more than adequate to meet compensation claims.

On the hon. Gentleman's last question, more than 2,500 dead birds have been recovered. More than 3,000 live birds have been recovered and are being cleaned up before release. A count of mammals conducted on Skomer Island 10 days ago showed about 80 oiled seals—three to five badly oiled, 40 moderately oiled and the rest lightly oiled.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that oil deposits are constantly being caused around our coastline—including the North Yorkshire coast, where the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has one of its best sanctuaries, at Bempton cliffs in my constituency—by tankers and other ships sluicing out oil into the North sea and other waters, and that there is evidence that the practice has been increasing in recent months? What plans does my right hon. Friend have to ensure that that disgusting practice is stopped?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that, day in and day out, an unacceptable amount of damage is caused by ships cleaning out their tanks. I assure him that my Department devotes substantial resources to detecting, where possible, the offenders and prosecuting them. We shall soon be publishing a draft Bill implementing a number of the Donaldson recommendations which require legislation. Some of those will deal with port waste facilities.

Mr. Ainger: Throughout Question Time today, the Secretary of State has referred to his inquiry as independent, but that is not the view taken in my constituency, in the rest of Wales and by many people throughout this country. Will he confirm that the terms of reference that he has given his so-called independent inquiry, to be undertaken by the marine accident investigation branch, makes no mention of the availability of salvage tugs, of the Donaldson inquiry recommendations, of the issue of single hulls versus double hulls, of the safety of port operations generally in and around Milford Haven, or of the need to examine current salvage law? As the MAIB inquiry is not comprehensive and its two-page interim report published only last Thursday contained five factual mistakes, does he now accept that much more information has emerged since his last statement to the House on this matter and that we need a full and independent inquiry, ideally under Lord Donaldson? As a major ecological disaster has taken place, will the Minister explain why we had an independent inquiry into the Braer and not into the Sea Empress?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The MAIB inquiry into the Braer accident was exactly the same as the one that we have established into this one. The Donaldson report was not an inquiry into the Braer accident, but a wide-ranging look at a range of issues dealing with marine pollution and safety at sea.

I made it absolutely clear in my recent statement to the House that the inquiry will cover a number of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised in the first part of his question. For example, it will cover whether enough tugs were available. It will also cover whether it would have made any difference if the Sea Empress had been a double-hulled rather than a single-hulled vessel. He should not therefore imply that the MAIB is not independent or that it will not consider certain specific issues when I have made it absolutely clear to the House that it will. Nor should he undermine the MAIB's independent status as it publishes its reports without fear or favour and has criticised my Department in the past.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the penalties to deal with those who jettison oil upon the seas are sufficiently strong, and is such behaviour being policed enough?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right to again draw attention to that matter. It is often quite difficult, having discovered the oil, to trace the vessel responsible for depositing it. Where possible, we shall track it down and take people to court. Substantial penalties are available against those who offend in this anti-social way.

Mr. Llwyd: In his answers about Milford Haven, the Secretary of State has been most complacent. I might save him some time in the context of the forthcoming inquiry by telling him that the Coastguard Agency advised that a heavy-duty salvage tug was available in west Wales for two days in December and for one day in January. The disaster happened in February and, to the best of my knowledge, a tug was not available. Is not it about time that the Government, if they really do learn from reports, implemented their recommendations?

Sir George Young: Of course if we establish inquiries we should take note of recommendations. I have announced that, of the 103 Donaldson recommendations, we have accepted 86. Since I made that announcement we have accepted a further five. Some of those that we are not taking forward immediately require international agreement and we have to reach that through the International Maritime Organisation. Others require legislation, and I shall soon publish a draft Bill that will take forward some recommendations that require legislation.

Public Transport Works (Compensation)

8. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to review the rules covering compensation following railway, underground and other public transport works. [17999]

Mr. Norris: We have no plans to review part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973, under which compensation is payable upon completion of public works.

Mr. Hughes: That is the answer that I feared. May I try to persuade the Minister to look again at two issues which colleagues have raised in relation to the channel tunnel rail link? My concerns relate to the Jubilee line and its consequences. First, if a business is adversely affected and the property is taken or partly taken, could we guarantee that the owner is put back into no worse a position than he would have been in if the works had not taken place? Secondly, in relation to public legislation or public works—railways or an underground system—the rules state that if a building is physically touched, compensation is payable. However, if the building is not touched, although there may be a huge hole a yard from the front door so that for years no one can find the door, let alone use it, compensation is not payable. Will the Minister look at the illogicality of the division between a building being physically affected and the clear effect on work, profit and viability of all the other consequences of the works?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is being assiduous in prosecuting the interests of his constituents, particularly those in Borough High street, which I know, in relation to the Jubilee line extension. I hope that in all fairness he will understand when I say that I would prefer not to be drawn into negotiations on compensation claims that affect a number of his constituents. On his second point, he is aware that there are substantial provisions to allow for compensation and purchase of affected property where the property is not required for the scheme but is clearly blighted by it. New rules in relation to that were recently published by my Department following the Owen case.

I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has among his constituents some shopkeepers and property owners who are finding it difficult to establish a link between the loss that they suffer and the statutory compensation that is available. I stress that that will always be a difficult area. Limitless compensation for blight or perceived blight in relation to any public sector works would put most of them beyond the purse or reach of the taxpayer or of the Government.

Dr. Twinn: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a link between planning delays and the lack of compensation or levels of compensation? If the Government relaxed their rules and looked at the French system of compensation, they might get much more public sympathy for public investment in infrastructure.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend, whose constituency contains the north circular road, knows that the average time between a good idea and that idea being rolled out as a piece of tarmac is 13 and a half years, of which 11 and a half are spent in the planning and public inquiry process. I have heard it suggested that we should adopt more generous compensation methods to truncate those inquiries. I hope that he will appreciate that that is a potentially extremely expensive course of action. In general, our compensation scheme attempts to put people who are affected in the same position as they would have been had the scheme not taken place. That involves negotiation, and on occasions, leads to delay. My hon. Friend's alternative, seductive as it may be in its simplicity, would in practice be a very expensive option.

Mr. William O'Brien: In view of the length of time that the rules of compensation have been in effect, does the Minister not think that it is time for a review, especially with regard to motorway and highway planning, for which the full information on pollution emissions is not being made available? If we are to have a proper and fair system of compensation, all information should be made available and the rules on compensation for blight should be updated through a review.

Mr. Norris: Following recent action in the Court of Appeal, we issued new guidelines on compensation precisely to try to relate more sympathetically to the position of property owners, especially with regard to discretionary purchase. As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), this is a very difficult area. Inevitably, if one considers all the cases where there may be some blight, a line has to be drawn and some people who are affected by schemes fall outside it. If the hon. Gentleman has any particular cases in mind, I would of course be very happy to look at them.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Is it not totally unsatisfactory that claimants against Stansted airport in my constituency are having to wait about four years, if not longer, before a settlement figure is reached? Is it not totally indefensible that the British Airports Authority should take upwards of four months after a settlement has been agreed to pay compensation? Does my hon. Friend accept that we need to look at the matter?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend has been extremely assiduous on behalf of his constituents who have been affected by noise at Stansted. He has made his own point in his own way. I am sure that the BAA will want to reflect on what he has said.

Trans-European Transport Networks

9. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will next meet his European Union counterparts to discuss trans-European transport networks. [18000]

Mr. Watts: My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping is deputising for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at a meeting of the Council of Ministers today, at which the transport networks will be discussed.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank the Minister for that reply. As part of his brief, is he putting forward proposals for a technical study on the electrification of the trans-European network railway line between London and south Wales that goes on to Ireland? If that is so, will further funding be made available for the electrification of that line?

Mr. Watts: The railway line from London to south Wales is already a high-speed line. As part of our TEN bid for the coming year, we are bidding for funding for a feasibility study on the upgrading of the Great Western lines to the south-west.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will my hon. Friend take a trip round the motorways of France to see how empty they are simply because of high tolls? Does he agree that the most environmentally friendly method of moving traffic is along free motorways?

Mr. Watts: The free movement of traffic on motorways is certainly convenient for road users and can greatly reduce the pollution caused by the same traffic moving slowly on congested and less suitable roads.

Marine Pollution

10. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the ability of Government agencies to respond to marine pollution incidents. [18001]

Sir George Young: The Coastguard Agency's marine pollution control unit is the Government's lead body for responding to pollution incidents. The MPCU is a long-established and internationally respected unit with specific responsibilities for operations to deal with pollution at sea from ships. The unit maintains the national contingency plan, which co-ordinates the response of the other central and local government bodies involved. It has stockpiles of equipment and is ready to initiate immediate response operations anywhere around the United Kingdom coast in the event of a spill.

Mr. Jones: Does the Minister agree that the accident to the Sea Empress caused 250 tonnes of oil to spill into the sea, but the salvage operation over the next week caused 70,000 tonnes of oil to be spilled? Will he respond to the letter that he recently received from the National

Trust, which listed 33 other organisations that are calling for an independent public inquiry into the accident? Will he listen to those demands, or have the Government something to hide?

Sir George Young: The Government have nothing to hide, which is why we have set up an independent inquiry. Of course I shall respond to the National Trust. The hon. Gentleman referred to requests for a full public inquiry, but that would involve legal representation of parties and lengthy adversarial public hearings and it would be extremely time-consuming. My priority is to find out, as quickly as possible, what went wrong, to establish the cause of the accident and to learn any relevant lessons. That is best done by an expert, independent investigation following the usual procedures set up by Parliament.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care Voucher Scheme

30. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the cost of the staff child care voucher scheme in the current financial year to date. [18022]

Mr. A. J. Beith (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): The expenditure on the child care voucher scheme since its inception on 1 April 1995 to date is £45,109.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. Does he concede that while it must be of some assistance to people to use the voucher scheme to put their children in nurseries near to their homes, is not it time that the Commission examined the likely cost and feasibility of running a proper nursery in this building, so that the children of staff and Members can be looked after in a place of safety within the building—thus bringing us up to date with the 20th century before it has passed us by? Any other large institution would have workplace child care facilities, such as a nursery. This building has absolutely nothing.

Mr. Beith: The Commission has examined that possibility and the House has debated it. I take it that since the last time that the hon. Gentleman asked me a question on that matter, he has not persuaded the Administration and Accommodation Committees, from which the Commission takes advice, that progress can be made on such a scheme.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is not it the case that hon. Members may issue child care vouchers to their own staff, to be debited against their office cost allowance? Bearing in mind the enthusiasm of a number of hon. Members on this issue, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us how many do so?

Mr. Beith: Hon. Members may do what the hon. Gentleman suggests, but establishing how many do so would require a question of the Leader of the House.

Jopling Reforms

31. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the cost of implementing the Jopling reforms. [18023]

Mr. Beith: There have been both direct costs and direct savings for the House's votes arising from the implementation of the Jopling reforms. There have been extra reporting and security costs because total sitting hours have actually increased, but with fewer sittings of the House continuing after 10.30 pm there have been savings in overtime, night allowances and late-night transport. The net effect so far has been an estimated reduction in costs of some £80,000.

Mr. Greenway: Have the staff responded happily to the more social hours that they are now enjoying? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that any more could be done to implement the Jopling reforms with a view to making life more acceptable to lady Members as well as gentlemen Members, in the way demanded in discussions outside the House?

Mr. Beith: As an individual Member, I should like more of the Jopling reforms to be carried out. However, the Commission's job is to make provision for the decisions that the House has made. As far as I am aware, the staff continue to work well and effectively in support of the arrangements, although the Commission has not canvassed opinion on whether they prefer them to the previous arrangements.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that against the financial savings must be weighed the very real fact that the increase in hours is entirely in debates where votes cannot be taken? Back-Bench Members have actually lost an advantage that they had previously, namely, that votes could be taken on Fridays—which is not now possible on the Adjournment debates. Although there is undoubtedly some positive benefit from the reforms, it is important that the House does not lose sight of the reason why we are here, which—saving the right hon. Gentleman's grace—is not to save money for his Commission, but to do a job for our constituents.

Mr. Beith: All those points were raised in the debates on the reforms. As far as I am aware, the reforms were not influenced by considerations of whether they would save money or not save money. The relatively complex balance I have just described indicates that it would be hard to argue for the reforms on that basis.

TRANSPORT

Marine Pollution

11. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the role of the salvors in the Sea Empress accident. [18002]

Sir George Young: As I announced in my recent statement, the marine accident investigation branch will examine the detail of the salvage operation as well as the causes of the original accident.

Mr. Dalyell: Can a system possibly be right in which the sole aim of the salvor is to save the ship?

Sir George Young: The system would not be right if that were the way in which it was structured; it is not structured like that. The reward due to the salvor is based on the value of the ship and the cargo that is salved. However, the contract also provides for an additional reward if, by his efforts, the salvor prevents or minimises environmental damage. In that way, the contract encourages the salvor to minimise environmental damage.

Dr. Spink: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that it is not yet at all certain that the accident and the disaster would have been averted or lessened if the ship had been double-hulled? Can he confirm that the inquiry will address that question?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is by no means certain that if the ship had been double-hulled, the disaster might have been avoided. He will be interested to learn that during the inquiry, we will simulate the accident to see whether a double hull would have made any difference.

12. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the recommendations contained in "Safer Ships and Cleaner Seas" have been accepted by his Department; and how many of these are now in practice. [18003]

Sir George Young: The Government accepted 86 of the 103 recommendations in the report when they published their response a year ago. They have since accepted a further five, and are considering another eight; only four have been rejected. Of the accepted recommendations, half have been implemented and action is being taken on all the others.

Dr. Godman: Has the Secretary of State made a definite timetable for the implementation of the recommendations on marine environmental high-risk areas? If he has such a timetable, will he outline the measures that would be taken in such areas to minimise the risk of accidents? He will not be surprised to hear me say that I think that the first such area should be the Minches.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman asks about recommendation 59 of the Donaldson report that so-called MEHRAs—marine environmental high-risk areas—should be established. We first need to establish whether the existing voluntary arrangements for routing are working. Our survey suggests that they are, but we will consult on the results. We also need to discuss with the EC the proposals for environmentally sensitive areas because international agreement will be needed on the definition of such areas before they can be implemented.

Sir Patrick Cormack: When can we expect to see appropriate tugs in all the appropriate places?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend will be interested to hear that we propose shortly to publish the so-called Belton report, which carried forward the Donaldson recommendations on the priorities for the location of tugs. We have implemented, as my hon. Friend knows, the priority recommendation that tugs should be situated at the Minches and at Dover. The Belton report will shed further light on the succeeding priorities.

Rail Privatisation

14. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the franchising of rail services. [18005]

Mr. Watts: The franchising programme is making good progress. Fourteen of the 25 train operating companies, representing 61 per cent. of passenger revenue in the financial year 1994-95, have either been franchised or are in the process of being sold.

Mr. Bayley: Do the Government still subscribe to the view that rail privatisation will bring increased competition? If so, do they regard it as a failure of policy that Wisconsin Transportation now owns all four freight companies? Is it true that the previous Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), went to the United States to encourage Wisconsin Transportation to bid for all four companies? What plans do the Government have to prevent private rail operators from taking over one another and creating massive private rail monopolies?

Mr. Watts: Train freight companies are not franchised, which was the point of the hon. Gentleman's original question, but sold. With his wide knowledge of transport, the hon. Gentleman will recognise that Railfreight has plenty of competitors, notably from the road haulage industry, and it was the verdict of the market that Railfreight would be stronger with the three companies in common ownership, because that view was reflected in all of the bids.

Mr. Lidington: Is my hon. Friend aware of the widespread concern in my constituency that the public service obligations required of bidders for the Chiltern franchise are not compatible with the proposed freight service sought by Central Railways Ltd.? Will he therefore issue clear guidance so that bidders for the Chiltern franchise and the customers who value the Chiltern passenger service know exactly where they stand?

Mr. Watts: No subsequent proposal can pose any threat to the continuation of passenger services, which are protected and guaranteed for the first time by passenger service requirements.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ministerial Accountability

33. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what procedural measures he proposes to increase the accountability of Ministers to the House. [18024]

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The Government will contribute to the Public Service Committee's examination of ministerial accountability in

the light of the Scott report. Sir Richard made no specific recommendations about the procedural arrangements of the House, but I am always ready to consider suggestions on procedural matters from hon. Members or from the Procedure Committee.

Mr. Bayley: In response to the Scott report, the Government claimed, ad nauseam, that Ministers had not knowingly misled Parliament, but the word "knowingly" was added to "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" only in July last year. Was it simply added to provide an alibi for the Government in the knowledge that the Scott report was coming? Will the Leader of the House consider removing the word from "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" so that Ministers who transgress must do what Lord Carrington more honourably did after the outbreak of hostilities in the south Atlantic, and resign?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman seems to be attempting to rerun a substantial debate that we have already had. If the Public Service Committee wishes to raise such points, no doubt they will be considered, but I find it a bit difficult to see why something that is done unknowingly should incur the wrath that the hon. Gentleman would like to bestow on it.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend look again at Friday sittings? Non-sitting Fridays deny Back-Bench Members of Parliament a valuable opportunity to table a private notice question. They also deny Ministers what can be a valuable opportunity to make a ministerial statement at 11 am on a matter quite unforeseen and of great national importance.

Mr. Newton: My general view is that the House collectively feels that the changes that were made following the Jopling report have been working rather well—including those that come up in a later question—and have given considerably increased opportunities to Back-Bench Members. I have no plans for a change at present.

Mr. Spearing: Would not the accountability of Ministers be improved if the suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)—in a later question on the Order Paper—for a Question Time on European Union matters were adopted? Would it not also be entirely compatible with protocol 13 of the treaty of Maastricht? Would not the Government be in a stronger position in respect of their colleagues in the European Union if they adopted the proposal of my hon. Friend and reverted to the practice before 1979?

Mr. Newton: The question whether there should be a dedicated Question Time on European matters has been looked at once or twice in the past and has not seemed to be a good idea. The Scrutiny Committee, which is currently conducting a further inquiry into the operation of scrutiny arrangements, might wish to make such a suggestion, although I am not aware at present that it is looking at that.

Adjournment Debates

34. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many subjects have been raised in Adjournment debates since the change in Sessional Orders became effective in January 1995. [18025]

Mr. Newton: I assume that my hon. Friend is interested in private Members' Adjournment debates. There have been 190 daily and 188 Wednesday morning Adjournment debates since the change in Sessional Orders became effective. I should add for the sake of completeness that there have also been 41 Government debates on the Adjournment.

Mr. Marshall: May I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and for the success of his reforms, which have confounded the sceptics, increased the amount of time available to private Members and enabled many more topics to be raised than were raised under the previous system?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend may utter those kind words. I shall receive them with the pleasure that they deserve.

EU Question Time

37. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals for a specific Question Time for European Union matters. [18029]

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so, in case that was not clear from my earlier answer.

Mr. Banks: May I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the question asked earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing)? He said that the practice of allocating a specific time to Common Market questions was scrapped. I believe that that was in 1979, after the election. Why was it scrapped? Surely it is wrong that we should have to rely on the luck of the draw in order to raise European Union issues when clearly Europe is one of the most significant matters, if not the most significant matter that the House is currently discussing. Why cannot we have a change? Is it because the Conservative Government are too embarrassed about answering questions from their own Back Benchers on the European Union?

Mr. Newton: I have some information about the history. I understand that the European Community slot was abolished in 1985, following pressure from some hon. Members and discussions through the usual channels. The matter was then looked at again in 1989, when my predecessor, the official Opposition and the Clerk of the House expressed scepticism about the reinstatement of such a slot.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had a request from a Minister to make a statement? You will be aware that the Government's scheme to privatise the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency was defeated in another place on Friday by 124 votes to 64. You will also be aware that the Prime Minister said, with regard to the privatisation of the Post Office, "We are democrats. If there is no majority, we do not proceed." This House needs a statement from the Government on how they intend to proceed. Are they to abandon the scheme? Are they to report it to a Select Committee? Or are they to bring it to this House for a debate and vote?

Madam Speaker: As far as my authority is concerned, I can answer only the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's question. I have not been told that any Minister is seeking to make a statement on the matter that the right hon. Gentleman raises.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I ask for your guidance. It is an unhappy subject relating to the printing of the embossed notepaper of the House of Commons, which carries the portcullis. It has come to my attention that the proprietor of the firm which prints it—Wilprint of Cardiff—was sent down for corruption for four months just before Christmas and came out in January. The portcullis and all our proceedings have to be seen to be entirely above board and free of even the most indirect taint of corruption. Could you explain to me how I should draw the matter to the attention of the proper authorities so that we can ensure that the portcullis of the House and the notepaper on which we write carry the respect that we always thought they had?

Madam Speaker: I had hoped to call the hon. Gentleman to put a supplementary question to the right hon. Member answering for the House of Commons Commission today, but it was not appropriate. Now that the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, which is new to me, I shall take it up with the Serjeant at Arms to see what can be done. The hon. Gentleman may also care to put a question to the House of Commons Commission so that we are all aware what the answer is.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. If the people of Cardiff do not want the work, there are many fine printers in Harrow who do.

Madam Speaker: We have very good printers in West Bromwich, West, too.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Aggrieved Members are always in a weak position to raise points of order, but I am fortified by the fact that I was lucky enough, by virtue of the low number of questions to the Commission, to be called today. From that position of strength, may I ask whether it is satisfactory that in 45 minutes we should have had only 10 questions on transport? When I first came here, 25 to 30 questions were got through.

Madam Speaker: I am absolutely delighted to have the support of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). He is a regular attender in the Chamber and must have heard me many times urging hon. Members to put short questions and Ministers to give brisk answers. We do not proceed through the Order Paper as briskly and effectively as I would like. I keep records every day of how far we proceed and every few months, I give them to the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House in the hope that they will urge Ministers and Front-Bench and Back-Bench Members to proceed more efficiently at Question Time. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, which enables me once again to urge all hon. Members and Ministers to deal more briskly with questions.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You referred to regular attendance. Do you think that the thin attendance in the Chamber outside of Prime Minister's Question Time on Tuesday and Thursday—there were fewer than 40 Back Benchers present for questions today—is linked with the fact that the media have stopped reporting the House? Is it not unfortunate that the heart of our parliamentary democracy is not being reported by the serious press?

Madam Speaker: Are we having a question-and-answer session? I have lots of views about why the serious press does not report the House as I think that it should, but this is not the appropriate time for me to express them. The time may come when I can do so and then I will do it very forcefully.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. How times change. I was reading in the Library the other day that on 29 February 1968,. Members started on a Thursday with overseas aid and got to Question 33. That was followed by the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who answered Eric Heffer twice—Questions 4 and 5. At that time, the press reported everything that went on in the House. I think that there is a law that says that the press reports in inverse proportion to the number of questions asked in the House of Commons.

Madam Speaker: I remember a time in the House when Members did not put supplementary questions. That dates me.

ESTIMATES DAY

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY, 1ST PART]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1995-96

Class XIII, Vote 4

Department of Social Security

[*Relevant documents: The Fifth Report from the Social Security Committee of Session 1994-95 on the Work of the Department of Social Security and its Agencies (House of Commons Paper No. 382); the Government Reply thereto (Cm. 3148); and the Social Security Departmental Report: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995-96 to 1997-98 (Cm. 2813).*]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £19,355,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1996 for expenditure by the Department of Social Security on administration, for agency payments, the promotion of Government policy on disability issues, and for certain other services including grants to local authorities and voluntary organisations.—[*Mr. Andrew Mitchell.*]

3.37 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am grateful for the opportunity for this debate, for which we thank the Liaison Committee and partly also the Department, whose supplementary estimate is such that it will allow hon. Members to speak on any aspect of its work and remain in order. I spent some time trying to think of an aspect of the Department's work that would be out of order, but I could not think of one. Perhaps other hon. Members will be more effective than me in that respect.

In opening the debate, I shall concentrate on one topic to which we gave some prominence in our fifth report on the work of the Department and its agencies and which we debated in the House last week, debated in Committee and have another opportunity to debate today—fraud. I wish to take the debate on and suggest some changes in its nuances that I believe are important not only for the House but for the taxpayers—those who are in work and who contribute £15 every day from their pay towards underwriting the social security budget.

First, I emphasise the importance of housing benefit fraud committed by landlords rather than that committed by claimants. Those who have heard me speak before know that I think fraud is wrong full stop, but as any Administration will have limited resources to combat fraud, it is sensible to deploy the resources in those areas where it is most prevalent. I fear that there may have been a difference in emphasis between the Select Committee on Social Security and the Secretary of State on that. When we questioned him on that aspect on Wednesday, we talked about evidence of landlord fraud and he said to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), "Not evidence—assertions".

I was referring to the evidence that the London borough of Haringey has put together. It has carried out a survey of landlords who have more than 30 claims paid direct to them every week. On the first 15 cases, the borough has carried out 1,300 visits so far—that is one borough, for a survey that is, so far, incomplete. That contrasts vividly with the Government's survey of housing benefit fraud, which they carried out throughout the country and which covered 4,500 claims. I am talking not about 4,500 investigations, but about 4,500 claimants, who were asked about their claims. If they could remember accurately what they had said when they first claimed benefit, no further investigations were undertaken.

Although the Government publicised that as a fraud survey, it was slightly misleading to the House and to those outside to do so because they were testing people's memories. I have a bad memory and would probably have failed to answer the questions correctly. I would not be able to remember what I said when I originally made a claim, which might have spurred the Government into further action by suggesting that there was fraud. The Government undertook, not a fraud inquiry, but a test of memory.

Let us consider the Haringey inquiry about which the Secretary of State was somewhat dismissive in the Select Committee. It was not carrying out a memory test. It has called at properties to question landlords and claimants where a landlord has more than 30 housing benefit claims paid directly to him in any one week. The council checked the national insurance number of each claimant and asked for further evidence from utility bills. It also checked in other boroughs whether double claims were being made and studied council tax payments.

For this debate, I asked Haringey to give us information on the first 15 landlords on which it called. I emphasise that those were landlords who had more than 30 housing benefit claims paid directly to them each week. I asked Haringey what the fraud rate was. Obviously, I will not read out the names of the landlords concerned or their agents as that would be unfair. I will refer to them by number.

The first landlord called on as part of the survey had 112 housing benefit claims paid direct to him each week—more than £13,000 was paid direct to that landlord in housing benefit—and 25 per cent. were shown by the Haringey anti-fraud inquiry to be fraudulent. The second landlord had 111 direct claims for housing benefit paid to him each week, totalling more than £13,000 of public money, and the fraud rate was 23 per cent. The third landlord had only 39 direct claims for housing benefit paid to him each week, totalling almost £3,000 a week of public money, and the fraud rate was 67 per cent.

The fourth landlord had 46 direct payments made to him every week, totalling some £4,000, and 26 per cent. were found to be fraudulent. The fifth landlord had 111 claims directly paid to him or her every week, totalling some £11,000, and 16 per cent. were shown to be fraudulent. The sixth landlord had 121 direct payments made to him every week, totalling almost £8,000 from public funds, and 15 per cent. were shown to be fraudulently claimed. The seventh landlord had 141 claims paid directly to him or her every week, totalling almost £9,000 from public funds, and 11 per cent. were fraudulently claimed.

The eighth landlord had 42 claims paid directly, totalling almost £8,000 a week, and 33 per cent. were shown to be fraudulent. The ninth landlord had 112 claims paid directly, totalling almost £11,000 a

[Mr. Frank Field]

week, and 59 per cent. were shown to be fraudulent. The 10th landlord had 69 claims paid directly each week, totalling more than £6,000 of public funds, and 29 per cent. were found to be fraudulent. The 11th landlord had 58 claims paid directly to him or her a week, totalling more than £7,000, and 15 per cent. were shown to be fraudulent.

The 12th landlord had 100 direct housing payments paid to him each week, totalling almost £17,000, and 10 per cent. were found to be fraudulent. The 13th landlord had 192 housing benefit claims paid directly to him a week, totalling £19,000, and 14 per cent. were shown to be fraudulent. The 14th landlord had 46 direct payments paid each week, totalling £4,000, and the fraud rate was 42 per cent. The 15th landlord had 62 direct claims paid each week, totalling more than £9,000 of public funds, and the fraud rate was more than 16 per cent.

I have put those cases on the record, without naming the landlords or their agents, because I want to support the hon. Member for Harrow, West, who is also a member of the Select Committee on Social Security. When he raised this question with the Secretary of State for Social Security, he was slightly terse with him and said that it was not evidence but assertions. The survey was conducted in Haringey—which happens to be a Labour authority, but would be matched by Westminster. Westminster is equally effective against fraud and it is carrying out a survey of all landlords who have more than 30 claims in housing benefits paid directly to them each week.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): For the record, my remark about assertions did not relate to the Haringey survey—which sounds extremely interesting. My only remark about the survey was that it involved 15 landlords and, obviously, we will investigate it and study the findings. We have absolutely no vested interest in understating the level of fraud. We are simply here to detect fraud, and to prevent and to deter it in the future. As such, we are at one with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security.

Mr. Field: I have no wish to score points, to be accused by hon. Friends who serve on the Committee of being vicious in the debate or even to be welcomed as crossing the Floor by my own side, as happened in our previous debate. I merely wish to place the evidence on record.

The Secretary of State made a very important contribution to our Select Committee hearing. He said that anti-fraud officers see fraud everywhere—I wish that that were true of all anti-fraud officers, but let us take that statement as being true—and that the important implication of that is that those people should be in the driving seat when we design programmes to combat fraud. He said that they know more about the subject than us and even some officers in the Department, because they are up against it every day. I shall return to that.

It is correct that I have cited only 15 of the 16 cases of which the Secretary of State has heard, and Haringey's survey will be a total survey of all those larger landlords in Haringey, but 1,300 visits have already been made in that borough. That contrasts with a national survey of only 4,500 inquiries by the Department.

I emphasised that in the Haringey survey, national insurance records, utility bills and council tax payment records have been checked and checks have been made with other boroughs, to verify whether claimants exist or are a creation of the landlord. That is a very different exercise from the memory test, which is what I suggest that the Secretary of State was undertaking when he inquired into housing benefit fraud.

I do not oppose memory tests. I merely suggest—I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), will consider this argument when he replies, or at least convey it to the Department—that the type of inquiry that Haringey has conducted needs to be done throughout the country, so that we do not test claimants' memories but examine what landlords are doing.

Some landlords draw very substantial sums from public funds. They are in a unique position, because they receive a large benefit now, which, even if it is not paid directly into their bank account, goes into their bank account. Every other benefit that the Secretary of State for Social Security pays on the taxpayer's behalf goes to claimants for them to spend. This is a direct transfer payment to a specific group, so it is a very special group. Therefore, a survey similar to the work that Haringey has done should be conducted for the entire country.

Had Westminster, not Haringey, been mentioned in the Select Committee, I would have telephoned Westminster city council and asked for equivalent information to that which Haringey has given us. Both authorities are outstanding in London in combating fraud.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): On the basis of the sample that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, will he estimate housing benefit fraud throughout the country? Is that fraud perpetrated only by the landlord, or is there a conspiracy between landlord and tenant?

Mr. Field: I am doubly grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention because it gives me the opportunity to make it clear that I am not suggesting that fraud is a one-way traffic, undertaken only by landlords. I am saying that it is important that the limited resources that at any one time the Treasury will allow the Department to have to counter fraud are deployed as effectively as possible and that, if we are interested in reducing the social security budget, especially the part boosted by fraud, our efforts should primarily go into areas where the gains will be quickest and biggest; and I am suggesting that the biggest gains would be from landlords. It is difficult for claimants to run a housing benefit fraud racket for any length of time. That is not to say that some of us do not have clever constituents who manage to do that, but it is difficult to do so without the landlord's help. Haringey is finding that many of the tenants whom it checks up on do not exist: they are fictitious tenants created by the landlord or previous tenants who have been recycled by the landlord.

That issue takes me neatly on to my second point. I gained a mere inference from what the Secretary of State said during our discussions last Wednesday that concerned me. I questioned the extent of child benefit fraud.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of housing benefit, I wish to make a further point. He will recall that during the interview that we had with the Secretary of State last Wednesday, I asked a question about the public spending consequences of the deregulation of rents. Typically, a former council-owned property could be rented for £150 a week in London, whereas the council rent would be about £50 a week, both of which rents might well be paid with housing benefit. The Secretary of State seemed unconcerned by that and unwilling to examine the public spending consequences of rent deregulation. Would it not be appropriate for the Secretary of State seriously to consider that issue? The public purse seems to be creating a large number of millionaire landlords through a process of rent deregulation and the open-ended payment of benefit for whatever rent the landlords choose to set in areas of great poverty and high levels of housing benefit.

Mr. Field: I congratulate my hon. Friend on making his point again in today's debate. I look forward to the Secretary of State rising at the Dispatch Box and shall be happy to give way to him. I also noticed that, when the Secretary of State was replying to my hon. Friend, he raised the important consideration of whether there could be any meaningful market rents in areas where the amount of rented housing stock was still so dependent on one landlord—the public sector. The public owner—the public landlord—could fix the market rate in the area and, by so doing, could determine the extent to which taxpayers would have to foot an increasingly large part of that bill.

Both my hon. Friend's question and the Secretary of State's response to it were intriguing. We did not receive an answer to that question in the Select Committee and have not yet done so today—perhaps the Secretary of State will respond to that question later. If the monopoly landlord is allowed to set the market rent in his area, the Government, and therefore taxpayers, seem to be over a barrel because we taxpayers have to foot the bill.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): If what my hon. Friend has said is true—all the evidence sent to him shows that a number of landlords are doing their best to swindle money out of the public purse—what confidence can we have that landlords in the private sector will not swindle their tenants? Does that not demonstrate how right many of us are when we say that people should not be subjected to private landlords when they have no choice? When people cannot buy and cannot obtain local authority accommodation, they are forced to become tenants of landlords such as those whom my hon. Friend has described.

Mr. Field: It is intolerable for our constituents to be in a market where they have no choice because there is only a limited supply of private rented accommodation. If the market was working well, the choice would be greater and the pressures of the market would be applied against the landlords. As my hon. Friend says, our constituents often face Hobson's choice and the more vulnerable they are, the more likely they are to be subjected to that form of aggression by landlords.

I suspect that many hon. Members read the survey in *The Sunday Times* of housing benefit millionaires—landlords who are in such profitable areas that they draw more than £1 million a year in housing benefit. The survey showed that the treatment of many tenants who existed was undesirable, while other tenants for whom claims had been made did not exist. When pressed to identify the accommodation to which certain claims related, landlords specified, for example, the space under a sink and part of a garage. We should have no illusions about landlords who, up to now, have been able to make easy pickings from the public purse.

As the Select Committee has pointed out, if we are to deal with fraud, we should do so where the gains will be easiest. I do not suggest that fraud of other kinds does not take place—indeed, we may have time to discuss some aspects today—but, for the moment, I wish to concentrate on landlord fraud.

Before that bevy of interventions, I was saying that more child benefit fraud may take place than the Department would like to think. I asked Haringey council whether it had carried out any surveys in relation to fictitious children. As the council is not responsible for the administration of such matters, it had conducted no surveys on child benefit fraud as such, but it checked whether landlords whom it was investigating had included children in their claims for housing benefit. Where children were included, it investigated whether they attended schools and had health records, and whether child benefit was being claimed.

The results of that investigation were staggering. More than 50 per cent. of the children for whom one landlord was claiming housing benefit were found not to exist, and a substantial number of such children in general did not exist. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) is concerned about women from other European Community countries who come here in the late stages of pregnancy, register the birth of their children here, disappear back to their own countries and then claim child benefit for the next 18 years. That may happen more than the Secretary of State thinks, and it may involve people from outside the European Community as well. We should concentrate anti-fraud campaigns on where fraud is greatest.

After listening to the Secretary of State's speech, I feared that the Department might be rather more interested in the photo-opportunities provided by the local spot checks of which he spoke than in any other aspect, and that the whole campaign might be merely a lead-up to the general election. It would be advantageous for one party to concentrate on claimants, and for the other to concentrate on landlords. I hope that we shall achieve a proper balance in future surveys, and will pay most attention to how we can retrieve the most money for taxpayers when wrongful claims are made.

I have managed to cover quite a few of the topics with which I wanted to deal, but my contribution would not be complete if I did not refer to national insurance numbers. Up to now, the emphasis in debates in the Chamber and in Committee has been on whether the right number of national insurance numbers are being issued. I do not for one moment disagree with the need to make the system secure, but I should like to suggest to the Government a rather different tack on how to accomplish it. My comments are based on events that occurred last Friday: the first happened in my surgery, and the second

[Mr. Field]

is from the experience of an anti-fraud officer in London. Neither event relates to whether there are 3 million or 10 million extra numbers floating around the system, but each emphasises how easy it is for national insurance numbers to be used by people other than those to whom they were allocated in the first place.

The anti-fraud officer, while looking for other information on a computer file, found a person's surname with two addresses listed for it, and the two addresses showed two national insurance numbers for the same name. The date of birth was the same for each of the names. The anti-fraud officer came across that information by accident, which suggests—leaving aside the issue of how many spare numbers are floating around the system—that the Government have yet to perform a data-matching exercise on the information that they have. If they had performed such an exercise, that piece of information would have been spat out and made available immediately.

The other example concerns a person who came to my surgery on Friday. He was not my constituent, but the constituent of my right hon. Friend—I rightly call him that—the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt). The constituent had been in employment all his life. He had one short period of self-employment because he lost his job, although he is now again working for an employer. He phoned the Contributions Agency in Newcastle because he wanted to pay, I believe, his class V contributions, which are made by self-employed people. He was asked to hold while his file was pulled up. He was then told, "You don't owe any money; you're in prison." He said, "I'm not in prison. I want to pay. I've been self-employed."

The man clearly did not realise the significance of the information he was giving me. It suggested that his national insurance number had been used—for how long we do not know—by someone else who had then been imprisoned. His national insurance contribution had been credited while the other person was in prison so that, when he called wishing to make his contributions to the fund for the period in which he was self-employed, he found that his contribution was complete.

A number of people, particularly anti-fraud officers, have suggested that "piggybacking" is much more substantial than we think. The Government, therefore, have a dual task. The first task will be to achieve a secure national system, which will take longer and will be very difficult because of the state of the numbers game, if I can call it that. In such a system, social security numbers should relate only to real people, and numbers that are spare because people die or stop making contributions should be held securely.

The stage beyond that is to decide how we make sure that people do not misuse the system, even if we could secure the safety of the current system of numbers. I previously suggested to the Secretary of State that, just as we are now going to receive notification of our pension contributions each year—what we have paid and what the charges are if we have a personal pension—should not we also be thinking about issuing a national insurance statement each year, showing what we have paid and what benefits we have received?

If we had such a statement, every incident of piggybacking would be reported to the genuine national insurance number holder, and the constituent whom I met on Friday would have received a statement informing him that he was registered as being in prison. It would have been clear that his number had been misused. We hope that his number is not still being used by the person in prison, but we do not know whether the prisoner's family is putting the number to good use.

A simple check would ensure that everyone knew whether his number was being used safely. If statements were issued randomly—not at the end of the financial year—someone involved in piggybacking would not necessarily know when a number's true holder was receiving his statement. We should therefore increase the chances of those misusing other people's numbers being caught.

The purpose of my contribution to today's debate—I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for calling me—is to try to change once again the emphasis of the Government's campaign against fraud. I am pleased that the Government have pushed the issue up the agenda and would like to think that the Select Committee has played a small part in concentrating the Department's mind on the importance of the problem. I hope that today's debate might also play a small part in changing the emphasis of the Government's follow-up to the initiative that they announced to the House last week.

4.11 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, and all the members of the Committee on their work. In many ways, the Select Committee on Social Security is a model Select Committee. It oversees the Department of Social Security's work thoroughly and conscientiously. I have read the Committee's fifth report, entitled "The Work of the Department of Social Security and its Agencies", and believe that it is an excellent report.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Birkenhead had to say about housing benefit fraud. If one grosses up the percentages that he mentioned—the examples of fraud that he cited varied from 15 per cent. to 67 per cent.—it would appear that the average fraud is around 30 per cent. If the level of housing benefit fraud is anywhere near that figure, there are substantial gains to be made from devoting resources to dealing with that aspect of fraud.

I agree that it is right to devote a finite amount of resources to aspects of social security likely to produce the greatest rewards. Clearly, we should consider landlords claiming large sums every week. The hon. Gentleman cited the case of one landlord who was receiving £19,000 a week in housing benefit, or £1 million a year. That is a substantial sum of taxpayers' money, by any measure. Such cases should be investigated as a matter of urgency. The House debated benefit fraud last week, and there is no doubt that the extra resources that the Department is rightly devoting to it have yielded substantial results. I believe that extra resources would produce further successes.

I was also interested in the hon. Gentleman's idea for an annual statement of contributions for everyone who contributes to the national insurance fund. Last year we

improved considerably the rights of members of private occupational pension schemes. As we are talking about millions of people, a substantial cost would be attached to such a statement, but there must be a case for providing regular information to national insurance contributors. An annual statement could usefully include someone's total contributions in a year, the total benefits that people had drawn in that time if they had had the misfortune to be unemployed or sick, and their prospective benefits, about which people start to worry as they approach retirement. They want to be sure that they have the maximum credits and that they will be able to draw a full pension. They want to know what their entitlement to the state earnings-related pension scheme will be. A statement on total prospective benefits would also be useful. People would welcome it.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Birkenhead is right that the total cost of the statement might easily be offset by the gains that would be made through exposing fraud. Obviously, that is impossible to measure, but the amount saved could easily cover the statement's cost. It could be a profitable exercise for taxpayers.

I was struck by one item of information revealed by the Select Committee when it investigated the Child Support Agency, as it has on a number of occasions. I think that I am right in saying that, after the first letter was sent to mothers or fathers on income support and they were asked to respond within eight weeks, many of them went off benefit immediately. That was one of the largest gains from the exercise. There has been much debate about the CSA's costs and benefits, but that substantial benefit to the taxpayer was a by-product of the system. It suggests that, if we communicate with beneficiaries regularly and ask them one or two awkward questions, they may quickly disappear off the map.

Mr. Frank Field: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, but the question of fraud is even more serious than he suggests. The enormous sums that taxpayers have got back as a result of that first envelope going out are merely the tip of the iceberg, because that does not cover people who are slightly more streetwise and know that the agency's administration is not as we would wish it to be and that, if they merely ignore the letter, the agency probably will not follow it up. I know that the agency would not want to use this language, but it has given an amnesty to parents who, in effect, put two fingers up to taxpayers by not replying to its letters. Those people are slightly more streetwise and know that the agency will never be able to get round to them.

In the first, I think, 18 months, £360 million-worth of books were returned—a substantial sum—but that is a small sum compared with what could be gained if we could only get the agency working effectively, if the amnesty for parents who are refusing to answer questions were withdrawn and if the agency could tackle those people effectively. The gains to taxpayers would be massive.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) is here. She piles in questions, the answers to which all put question marks over how well the agency works. The one sector where we never thought the agency would be a success, where it has turned out to be a major success, but where it could be an even bigger success, is in countering fraud.

Mr. Smith: That suggests that, if additional resources were available to the agency and it was able to follow up some of the people who did not reply to its letters, further huge gains could be made. Some people do not receive letters in the first place. Admittedly, they are nothing to do with the CSA, but the implication must be that, if they were written to from time to time, they too might not claim. I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Obviously, it is hard, by definition, to measure fraud, but the taxpayer would probably gain greatly if more resources were devoted to it.

In its fifth report, the Committee looked at the operation of the executive agencies of the Department of Social Security. The DSS is unusual in that almost all its work is carried out through agencies, which means that almost all the money that it spends is spent through agencies. It is a useful case study, and the Department covers the largest agency, the Benefits Agency. I was interested in a comment on that issue by Sir Michael Partridge, who retired recently from the post of permanent secretary at the DSS.

It has always seemed to me that one of the principal advantages of establishing the executive agency system was that for the first time there would be a clear distinction within the civil service between policy advice and policy execution. In that context, what Sir Michael Partridge told the Committee was interesting. He said:

"In the past I used to sit there with these enormous piles of paper . . . This was a tremendous waste of time. I now have virtually no paper. So my role has changed much more to thinking about the future, getting my staff to run the Department in a proper way and to be much more accountable to me, much more quickly, and to Ministers, for their performance. I feel I have much more handle on what is happening in the Department and what is going wrong, than I did from trying to spend hours and hours looking at minutiae."

Of course, the permanent secretary in any Department, most of whose service delivery is carried out through the agencies, is able to concentrate on policy advice to Ministers, because other people—the chief executives of the agencies, who are also accounting officers—can be held to account by the House and are regularly summoned by Select Committees. That has been a great success, because it has started to change the culture of the civil service.

At one time, those who wanted to get on in the civil service had to be good at advising Ministers—the key was policy advice—and although most of the Department's money was spent on services, delivering them took second place. That has changed a great deal.

In paragraph 75, the Committee reported:

"A kind of transfer league is developing in Chief Executives."

That is good, because some people are coming in from outside. An example is Michael Bichard who, I think, was chief executive of Gloucester city council. He is now the permanent secretary in the Department and he got there by first becoming chief executive of the Benefits Agency. At present, there is as much emphasis on policy execution and on being good at making sure that the Government's customers get a good service as there used to be on policy advice. That is a great improvement, and the DSS has led the field in that respect.

Mr. Corbyn: Has the hon. Gentleman ever thought of the irony of a market developing in highly paid chief executives of these agencies, who force market testing down the throats of low-paid employees in their Departments, make large numbers redundant and try to worsen their working conditions? Apparently, incentives are required for chief executives, but sticks are needed for low-paid people, many of whom have given a lifetime of service to the civil service. They feel outraged and alienated because of the way in which they have been treated.

Mr. Smith: Those people do not need to be upset because chief executives are well paid. If good people are wanted, one must pay a reasonable price and compare it with the price paid in the private sector. I agree that a better performance will not be had from an employee by reducing his remuneration or worsening his working conditions. Better performance can be had by adopting the opposite approach—by offering incentives, measuring performance and improving job satisfaction. That is the right way to do it, and to that extent I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

The agencies have been a success. For example, a three-year evaluation in the Contributions Agency

"concluded that in each year efficiency savings had been exceeded and the milestone targets had been achieved and that 'Agency status has therefore clearly resulted in improved performance, accountability and value for money'".

That refers to the Contributions Agency, but I would say the same about the Benefits Agency.

The concept of customer service did not operate in the administration of social security benefits in local offices, say, 10 years ago, before the Benefits Agency was established. My local office in High Wycombe, which provides a service to my constituents, has been transformed over that time. A huge effort is made to help and advise people, some of whom are the most vulnerable in our society. It tries to provide a decent service. The system is complex and there is a range of benefits, but the service has improved.

Some people might say that the improvement is only superficial, but I do not agree. The area that people visit has greatly improved. At one time, people who visited the front office were treated almost as if they were not human beings. They were made to wait for very long periods in appalling conditions.

The whole set-up has become much more customer friendly. That is because—this relates to my point about job satisfaction—there is much more staff training at the Benefits Agency, which is good for staff and customers. As a consequence of staff training, customers are receiving a much better service.

Mr. Frank Field: Although most of us have seen the transformation of our local offices under the agency agreement—provided that we do not represent a London constituency and have found that offices have moved out of the area—does the hon. Gentleman think that the improvement will be such that in the next year or two, the Comptroller and Auditor General will be able to sign the agency's accounts, given that he has refused them an unqualified audit since income support was introduced?

Mr. Smith: It is a most unsatisfactory matter. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I can certainly say that the Committee is not complacent about it in the slightest. The necessity for the Comptroller and Auditor General to qualify the audit of any Government Department or executive agency is a matter for concern. It suggests that the agency's record keeping is still unsatisfactory and that there is still room for improvement, which I believe is the case.

Although I was focusing particularly on the way in which the agency deals with its customers, I acknowledge the need for improvement. When the National Audit Office carried out a sample check on the payment of income support, it found an unacceptably high error rate. That suggests that, although there has been much staff training, there is a need for more. There must be better quality outputs. That is what it is all about—measuring output and getting better performance, which at the moment is not good enough. Errors impact both ways—some beneficiaries lose out and some gain. The error rate of the Inland Revenue is not nearly as high as that of the Benefits Agency. The Benefits Agency has scope for further improvement and will have to work over the next few months and years to improve its performance.

One point in the report that interested me was the very important concept of a one-stop shop. When claimants go to a local benefits office, it is normally possible for them to see one officer, who is able to deal with the whole range of benefits. The Committee makes the point that very often such officers will have to deal not only with social security. In fact, that would be rather unusual. Somebody on income support would almost certainly be claiming housing benefit and council tax benefit, and even be dealing with the Inland Revenue—certainly if he had become unemployed in the previous 12 months. He would therefore have to deal with another Government agency.

The idea of trying to bring all those claims together at one advice point is obviously very ambitious. We are talking principally about co-operation between local benefits offices and local councils. Two different council departments would be involved—one dealing with housing benefit and one with council tax benefit. That is something which the Committee should pursue with the Government, to see what further progress can be made.

We all know, from dealing with individual constituents, that there is a bewildering maze of different benefits. To have reached the point where someone can see just one officer in a benefits office is obviously a tremendous step forward. If we could take that further, so that someone could talk to just one person about the whole range of benefits, possibly including even his income tax position, that would be a tremendous step towards helping people with a very complicated matter. Indeed, some of the benefit forms are even more complicated than income tax returns. Of course, no one gives a high priority to completing an income tax return; nor do people enthuse over doing so. The Inland Revenue says that it may be easier when we have self-assessment, but I doubt it. Claiming social security benefits is a difficult process and we should do everything we can to support people in doing so.

4.30 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): This is almost a re-run of our debate in the Chamber last week on benefit fraud. Before dealing with some of the issues in the Social Security Select Committee report, I want to refer to the total amount of social security expenditure. It is fashionable for the media and hon. Members to say that

social security is unaffordable. I do not doubt that spending on social security is high. Indeed, the Government estimate that it will be £90 billion for the year 1995-96, which will cost every working person £15 a day. What I want to ask all hon. Members is whether there is a cheaper alternative. Quite honestly, I do not believe that there is.

Any alternative must pass two tests—first, is it cheaper for the Department of Social Security and the Government as a whole, and secondly, is it cheaper for the people of this country? If it does not pass those tests, we shall be passing the buck, because the bill to the family will rise, even though the taxpayer might find things easier. At the end of the week, month or year, the person concerned will have to pay more.

There is a frequently expressed fear about a demographic time bomb, with the country being overrun by senior citizens in a couple of decades. In reality, the growth has already started. A DSS publication says that in 1990, 15 per cent. of the population were over 65. It predicted a slight fall to 14 per cent. in the year 2000 and then a rise to 16 per cent. in 2020. Of course, we must take account of the importance of the number of retired people in society compared with the number of people who are actually working, but even on those figures, the position will not be as bad as some of the predictions suggest. For example, the proportion of pensioners to people of working age in 1990 was 23 per cent. It is predicted that the figure will rise to 26 per cent. in 2020. That is better than the figures for 12 other European Union countries, where the proportion was 21 per cent. in 1990, rising to 29 per cent. in 2020. In other words, the figure for the EU will rise by 8 per cent. compared with a UK rise of 3 per cent.

Although I do not doubt that there are grounds for concern, I do not believe that there are grounds for alarm. Some people in the media are sounding the alarm bells, but before we start slashing spending on social security and disentitling many more people, we must look at the consequences. We must consider whether private provision is any cheaper. It certainly is not cheaper for sickness, for disability or for unemployment. The basic principle of insurance is spreading the risk; no system can spread the risk more widely than the national insurance system.

We must also examine the costs of any cuts in social security benefit to the Government and to the nation. Cuts in housing benefit and income support, for example, may save the Department of Social Security money, but what are the costs to other Departments? There may be costs to the Home Office from increasing crime, and the taxpayers' bill may go up because of homelessness. We should consider the number of homeless people with tuberculosis—200 times more than the national average. If homeless people fall ill, the cost to the national health service is greater. All Departments, especially the Department of Social Security, must look at the knock-on effects on other Departments and at the overall bill for the Government.

I now come to the Select Committee report. If there is a back-to-work strategy for unemployed and lone parents, they must be given advice about their financial position and entitlements. I welcome that, but I believe that we must also help people back into work. The payment of child care costs is a wise investment for the future. Apart from that, we need far bolder measures, and I do not believe that that point is being addressed.

The Select Committee recommended that, on a trial basis, calls to the War Pensions Agency helpline should be charged at the local rate, and I sincerely hope that the Government will accept that. I know that they have said that they will look at the suggestion and that they will consider the cost to the Department of Social Security, but I wish that they would just accept it. The recent reforms of war pensions are not going smoothly—we all know that. War pensioners and war widows need the helpline service, and they need their calls to be charged at the local rate. It is well known that I have never been a great supporter of the Child Support Agency and that I would like it to be scrapped. However, if the CSA can provide that service—anyone who telephones the CSA is charged at the local rate—I do not see why the War Pensions Agency cannot do the same.

I shall not go into detail about benefit fraud and the take-up of benefits, because we had a discussion about that last week. I welcome the Select Committee's recommendations. But anti-fraud activities have to go hand in hand with promoting the take-up of benefits, especially pensions. Some pensioners do not take up their entitlement to income support, which means that they miss the cold weather payments as well. Some 305 pensioners had hypothermia listed on their death certificate in 1994. How many of those pensioners did not get the income support and the cold weather payments to which they were entitled? The situation could get even worse if we do not promote the take-up of income support by pensioners who are supposed to get it.

Ten days ago, it was reported in *The Guardian* that there would be short-term savings by the Department of Social Security. It was suggested that the Department would remove services that encouraged people to obtain the £2 billion of unclaimed benefits and that there would be cuts in the telephone advice lines. It was also suggested that the Department would end the extension of benefit office opening hours and that it would stop the benefit buses—the buses that go to outlying areas, so that people's queries can be answered in their locality. Will the Minister confirm or deny that those cuts will really take place? If he confirms that they will take place, will he explain the reasoning behind the decision?

Social security spending must be closely monitored. We must fight waste, whether from fraud or from overpayment. As I have said many times, £546 million was overpaid in income support last year, mainly through official error. That must also be addressed when we talk about waste.

I welcome what the Government are doing on benefit fraud, but when it comes to the growth of expenditure on social security, we must keep things in proportion. Social security spending, as I said earlier, is high, but there is probably no cheaper alternative for families' bills at the end of the week or month. It is certainly not right simply to pass the buck to other Departments, charities or the population as a whole.

4.40 pm

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): It is nice to have an early opportunity to enter the debate, even though it is earlier than I, in my naivety, had expected.

[Mr. Malcolm Wicks]

We are discussing not only the recent work of the Select Committee but supplementary estimates. Indeed, we are formally asked to approve an extra £19 million to the cash limit for the running costs of the Department of Social Security. Often, the House takes scrutiny of public spending too lightly, but it should be no light matter that we are asked to approve a further £19 million. As, according to my arithmetic, much of the money is for the running costs of the Child Support Agency, I shall focus later on the work of the CSA. I hope that the Minister will be encouraged to update us on its work and present a progress report, because we need progress on the implementation of child support.

I am a recently retired member of the Social Security Committee. It is appropriate that its esteemed Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), opened the debate. It was a privilege to serve on it under his chairmanship for one parliamentary Session. I welcome the opportunity that I had to work with him and, indeed, Conservative colleagues. I had the honour of contributing in a small way to the report that we are discussing today.

We should put the supplementary estimate in the context of the increase in public expenditure on social security. In 1989-90, we spent some £50 billion on social security. That figure is now £90 billion in cash terms, which is a considerable increase. It is easily the largest of our public expenditure programmes. Indeed, it represents a staggering one third of total public expenditure.

Mr. Frank Field: Before my hon. Friend leaves this point, I hope that he will find time to talk about the change in the nature of poverty. Whereas we talked of it primarily in economic terms and causes, we now—as I think my hon. Friend is hinting at—talk of it as being much more socially based.

Mr. Wicks: Indeed. The Chairman of my former Committee anticipates some of my remarks and hits on a very important point about family insecurity. I shall say something about that, but we should dwell on the sheer size of the social security budget, which now represents one third of total public spending. Although it would be rash, I suspect, to argue the possibility of bringing that total down, I feel instinctively that it is consuming too large a proportion of public spending and, given the other demands on the welfare state and the Government, we should look critically at it.

I ask the House to distinguish between the term social security—not in the sense of rather dry terminology for a set of benefits—and state benefits. I put it to the House that what makes social security, in the proper usage of that term, is not just state benefits. Many other factors contribute to social security. Indeed, many of the other factors are often more important than the contribution to security that comes from state benefits. I also argue that, on state benefits, we need to be vigorous and rigorous about defining objectives and to look critically at the public expenditure total to see to what extent some public spending relates directly to the objectives and to true social security, and to what extent public spending is perhaps more a symptom of social insecurity and of the fact that other parts of society, the economy and public policy are not working as well as they should. I shall give one example.

I do not think that any of the great figures who have set out social security objectives have ever said that it is an objective of social security policy to enable men in their 50s or early 60s to draw benefits—whether invalidity benefits or income support—as a stop-gap measure between an early period of unemployment or redundancy and when they are able to draw their state retirement pension, yet the data on economic inactivity, or what is essentially unemployment, show that a large proportion of men who are not so old are economically inactive. They are out of the labour market.

I sometimes think that the House has a strange custom of discussing the retirement age, not least in relation to European directives towards gender equality and whether to equalise at 65, 60 or 63. We have had that debate. It is all based on an assumption that men retire at 65. Some do. Some of us may hope to retire later.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): The hon. Gentleman is being optimistic.

Mr. Wicks: The hon. Gentleman—my pair—is worried about my employment security. I can tell him that I am rather more confident about it at the moment than he has any right to be about his.

Men aged 55 to 59 can hardly be considered old. One would expect some 90 per cent. of them to be in employment, but the reality is that one in three is out of work. In the slightly older group—those aged 60 to 64, who are in the period just before retirement—just over four out of 10 are in work. The amount of economic inactivity among middle-aged to older men is massive. That was never meant to be. William Beveridge, Labour Governments and Conservative Governments never said that we should support that group, through social security, income support or invalidity benefits of one kind or another to be on benefit and not in work, but it has come to be.

I was following the remarks of the hon. Member for Rotherham—

Mr. Field: Rochdale.

Mr. Wicks: It was certainly somewhere beginning with an R. I apologise to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and the good people of—

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Rotherham.

Ms Lynne: Rochdale.

Mr. Wicks: My ungallant Friend said Rotherham, but, being more gallant, I meant Rochdale. The hon. Lady argued that we should be able to afford that sum of money. I am inclined to agree with her at one level, but only if we are convinced that we are spending it properly. I am not convinced that we are doing so at present. Let us have a debate about social security objectives and ensure that public money is spent appropriately on them.

Mr. Field: Before my hon. Friend develops that theme, may I take him back one step? He rightly emphasises that many people now feel insecure and that social security payments support that insecurity. Is it not also true that a

large number of men are inactive in the age group to which he refers because they have been able to draw down their occupational pension early, so we now get the success of the company pension scheme impacting on the social security budget?

In my area—some distance from Croydon, but not that far from Rochdale—two former public utilities are merging and there will be large-scale lay-offs. We are also affected by the Mobil-BP merger, which will result in lay-offs. Does my hon. Friend think that we ought to consider whether it is necessary to issue social security impact statements when firms propose merging and, to use the euphemistic expression, downsizing their labour forces? Much of the cost of the two mergers in my area will be borne by taxpayers in general, who will have to pick up the social security costs of people who would otherwise be in work but will become unemployed, and soon unemployable, as a result of those changes.

Mr. Wicks: That is an interesting observation and recommendation, to which we shall certainly want to give more thought. If it seems to be a good idea, given that the Department of Social Security plans so radically to cut its running costs and, presumably, its labour force, perhaps it should make the first social security impact statement. The Minister might want to announce that later if he intends to proceed along those lines.

Given the importance of spending our social security money effectively, the theme of fraud, which my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead introduced, is obviously important. I shall not add to his remarks, but we agree with the emphasis he put on the need to combat fraud. We welcome the recent increased determination of the Government, but we would want to go rather further. It would be worth calculating at some stage how much money has been squandered these past 16 years because the Government have made only lame attempts to combat fraud. It must become a key social security objective to ensure the promotion of the honest social security pound; to ensure that every pound of taxpayers' money is spent as honestly as possible.

In my advice surgery in Croydon, North-West, when I sometimes have to explain to people who are hard pressed that they will not receive more benefit, despite their old age or disability, it makes me furious to think that we are being defrauded of hundreds of thousands, millions or perhaps billions of pounds that could be used for people in genuine need. It is a very human matter.

We need to distinguish between the public policies that would make for social security and the role within them of state benefits. My theme is that the two are rather different. They are not necessarily the same. We need to use the phrase "social security" in the proper sense in the English language. What makes for social security in that wider sense? I suppose that most fundamental is the economy and employment, and enabling more of our citizens to find a secure place in the job market. That is obvious. It was well understood by William Beveridge, but we need a renewed determination to enable more of our citizens to get into employment.

Therefore, Opposition Members were in despair when we heard the proposals of the Deputy Prime Minister to deregulate the employment market for those in small businesses. If there was one thing that we did not need at this precise time, it was a suggestion that a Deputy Prime Minister could be seriously contemplating making more of our citizens economically insecure and therefore insecure about their social life, their housing and the rest of it. This is precisely the time when enhancing and developing security should be one of the major and first responsibilities of government.

If economic security and employment security are important, we need to work hard at changing our social security system. I remember very well one particular constituent who came to my advice surgery in Thornton Heath about a housing problem. We talked more generally about her situation. She was on income support. She was drawing housing benefit. In some respects, she was totally dependent on the state. She was a prime example of the state of dependency that has been created these past 15 or so years, a state that we have to change in the coming five years.

When I asked my constituent how she saw her future, her eyes started to shine and she said, "I want a job." I asked her what she wanted to do. She wanted to be a traffic warden. Not only did she have determination, but she was brave, given the circumstances of Croydon traffic, and had an ambition which should have been fostered. I asked whether she ever talked of her ambition when she went to the DSS office and talked to various officials. She said that no one had ever asked her if she wanted a job. No one had ever sat down with her to talk about her ambition and how it might be realised.

Under the current social security regime, a lone mother is entitled to draw income support until her youngest child is 16. We have to start to change the culture. I am talking not about compulsion but about sensitivity. I am talking about a social security office where, in liaison with an employment office, someone would sit down with that young woman and say, "This is great news. You have a good ambition. We are going to help you. We are going to talk about your training and building any confidence that you might need,"—although this young woman did not need confidence; she had plenty of it—"We are going to talk about child care implications and the jobs that are available. We will certainly fix you up with the traffic warden people, but we will talk to other people. We can take some months on this." Was that happening? No, it was not.

The future social security system has to be in the business of helping young women such as my constituent who have no ambition to remain dependent or to draw social security for ever, but have an ambition to be independent. How we move from dependency to independence is the key theme of social security policy in the late 1990s.

I have talked about employment security. Let me also talk about family security and insecurity—the theme that my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead tempted me to discuss and one that I want to discuss. Family security is as important as economic security in enabling us to live our lives in a satisfactory way, not only in terms of cash, although that it important, but more generally. Family breakdown and related family change are now a major cause of poverty, disadvantage and new forms of inequality that are opening up in our society. If we need evidence of that, it comes in part from the Select Committee report on low income statistics that was published in February 1995. The report includes a table that shows that family breakdown and the rise of the

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lone-parent family is probably a more important cause of poverty and disadvantage than are the traditional causes of unemployment and low wages.

Data for 1992 show that 3.6 million—almost 3.7 million—children in Great Britain are dependent on income support or in families that have net resources below the income support level because of low wages. That is a shocking indicator of child poverty in a supposedly affluent society. Of those children, 1.8 million are in lone-parent families. Unemployment contributes a huge 1 million children, but the number of children in lone-parent families is much greater. William Beveridge would not have recognised that phenomenon. In 1942, when he and Parliament examined the causes of social insecurity that needed to be tackled by social insurance and the national assistance scheme, that factor was not uppermost in their minds. We need to work hard at addressing that considerable problem.

I want to consider how the power and pace of family change contribute to social insecurity and new forms of child poverty. First, more children are born out of wedlock. I make no moral judgments on that—it is not the subject of the debate—but the statistics relate to our theme of child poverty and social insecurity. Back in 1960, only 5 per cent. of children were born out of wedlock. Today, the proportion is a massive 32 per cent. Nearly one in three children are born outside marriage. Half of them are born to cohabiting couples; the other half to single unmarried mothers. We know that 85 per cent. of single unmarried mothers draw income support. It is a demographic trend of direct relevance to the estimates and public spending.

While cohabitation comes in all shapes and sizes and can include some of the most well-to-do and affluent couples, there is a general association between cohabitation and disadvantage. Although demographers are not clear about it, my reading of the research suggests that cohabiting parents are more likely to suffer a breakdown of their relationship than are married couple parents. That is a contributory factor to insecurity. I have mentioned the change since 1960, but over the past decade alone, the number of children born outside marriage has almost doubled. That is a rapid change with major consequences for our debates on social security and social insecurity.

There is also the question of divorce, which is exercising our minds and those of modern Governments more and more. It is no coincidence that the House will soon receive a Bill on divorce law reform from the other place. The key question is how to obtain a modern divorce law that puts children first. Pension splitting and the social security implications of divorce are related themes. The Child Support Agency is another consequence of divorce and has become a powerful theme. The bad news is that it will become even more important in the future.

I recently asked a parliamentary question to update some data with which I had been familiar when I worked at the Family Policy Studies Centre. I asked Government statisticians, who are the best in the country for such forecasting, what percentage of marriages are likely to end in divorce. The answer was 41 per cent.—more than four out of 10. That forecast is not wild, but a sober estimate by sensible demographers and scientists. The issues surrounding that, which relate to child maintenance, are crucial to our social security. I shall come to them later. If we do not get that right, we are in deep trouble in respect of insecurities among families and of state spending on benefits.

Every year, there are 160,000 children under 16 in Great Britain whose parents divorce. It is interesting that the children involved are becoming younger. Divorces occur more quickly than they did 10 or 15 years ago. The figures for 1993 for England and Wales show that there were 55,000 children under five who had mums and dads who divorced—25 per cent. more than in 1983. Not only are many children affected by the phenomenon but they are wearing an even younger face than they used to. More children spend some or all of their childhoods in one-parent families.

The picture is further complicated by remarriage and, to use a slightly ugly expression, repartnering. The Minister winces because he is a sensitive man. I use the word because cohabitation is more common after the break-up of first marriages than as a substitute for first marriages. We have to invent a term for that. One in three marriages this weekend will involve someone marrying for the second time.

The phenomenon of the step-family, which is well known in literature and fairy tales, is becoming more important. It is estimated that 1 million or more children under 16 live in step-families. Of them, 770,000—the majority—are stepchildren but 280,000 are children of new relationships. Any attempt by society through state and government to consider the social policy implications of those trends, not least in relation to child maintenance, deals with complex territory. The complexity of the child support formula needs to be addressed. There is a legitimate debate about whether it should be yet more complex—more sensitive to particular circumstances—or whether we should have a simpler formula and rougher justice. I believe that the Select Committee will consider that issue in this Session.

The complexity is caused by the family circumstances and human relationships becoming more complex. Politicians, the Government and Parliament have been slow to address those issues because they feel uncomfortable about tackling some of the most difficult, complex and sensitive matters in society. The politician treads into the blood and thunder of human relationships and their breakdown at his or her peril. Even the best imaginable system, which I am bound to say we do not have at the moment, will run into difficulties because of that. That is relevant because the Government are asking us to approve supplementary estimates that include another £16 million for the running of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Tim Smith: The hon. Gentleman has given us an interesting description of recent social trends and many of the aspects that he describes are deeply worrying. Is he suggesting that the social security system has been the cause of those trends? I wonder what he thinks we should do about them, if anything. How should the social security system respond to them? He said that we are spending too much on social security, so what changes do we need to make?

Mr. Wicks: I shall deal with the Child Support Agency and how we can create more effectiveness and fairness later. In direct response to the hon. Gentleman's

thoughtful question, however, I do not believe that our social security arrangements contribute to family breakdown, although I recognise that there is an interesting debate to be had on that point.

At the moment, we seem to spend an awful lot of energy, time, legislation and public money on the consequences of family breakdown. The House of Commons Library gave me some figures, which show that the public costs of divorce are about £4 billion every year. Most of that is made up of social security—income support and so forth—but some is legal aid and the impact on the health service. How much money are we spending trying to save marriages and support family relationships? We spend money on Relate and other marriage guidance services.

I want a shift of emphasis towards trying to support and help relationships in trouble, rather than spending all our energy and public resources on breakdown when it occurs. As a long-standing advocate of a family policy strategy, I would certainly say that we have not got the balance right.

I am arguing that the social revolution of family change that we are in the midst of has not been without victims. It has not been a bloodless revolution—there are very few such revolutions. Victims come in all shapes and sizes and, of course, include many men, not least those who find that they are unable to continue a relationship with their children.

In financial terms, the main victims have always been, and remain, the women and children. It has been a case of women and children last in that aspect of family politics. We see that in the poverty statistics and in the fact that, in the main—of course, there are exceptions—it is women and children who have to depend on the state and on income support. One million one-parent families are drawing income support.

Whatever our criticism of the operation of the CSA—being a passionate believer in the principle of parental responsibility, I am among the foremost critics of the workings of that agency in practice—we must remember that the old system simply did not work. Anyone who advocates turning back the clock to a court-based system has to confront the data and the evidence that show that it was a failure. It delivered maintenance to only about one third of children.

Ms Lynne: I agree that the old system of the liable relatives unit, in particular, was a failure. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in terms of cost, there is not much to choose between the CSA and the old system? Some figures that I have obtained even suggest that the old liable relatives unit was far most cost-effective in saving the taxpayer money. Although I would not want a return to that unit—I would like a unified family court system, in which every case was assessed individually—I want us to get away from the formula system.

Mr. Wicks: I understand the hon. Lady's argument, but I do not support it. We cannot return to that sort of court system, although I know that the hon. Lady denies it. We need to think hard about ways of bringing greater sensitivity and justice into the system. I shall deal with that briefly later, if there is time.

It is a pity that we do not know more about the workings of the old maintenance system. I do not think that it was researched thoroughly and I have never seen a proper report on it. Our public debates on its pros and cons would be advanced if we had more information.

I have already hinted at the argument that, given the complexity of human and family relationships, developing an effective child support or maintenance policy was always going to be difficult. Although those of us who had the opportunity to study the Australian and New Zealand systems of child support recently were impressed by aspects of those systems—certainly by the Australian system—even in those societies the systems have been immensely controversial and the subject of the majority of contributions to parliamentarians' postbags, as in this country.

I do not think that I say this merely with the benefit of hindsight—the case was argued at the time—but the Child Support Agency should have been introduced in a far more sensitive way. Ideally—in the politics of Thatcherism it was never going to happen—the emphasis should have been placed on child support as social policy, not on the mean-minded morality that it quickly became when it was introduced by the former Prime Minister, then Mrs. Thatcher. After all, it is called child support; it should have been genuine child support. I am becoming increasingly concerned about the matter because, in a sense, we have missed an historic opportunity for a proper public debate about child support and the obligations of parents to their children.

I can think of two questions that should have been central to that debate—there are probably others. First, how, in the great majority of cases, do we enable both parents to share in the care and maintenance of their children in turbulent family times? There will always be exceptions when men are violent and so forth.

I have reviewed briefly some of the demographics, but my argument is that, sadly, turbulent family times will not go away in the next 10 years. If—this may now be true—only about 50 per cent. of children will spend all their childhood in what we once would have called the traditional family and are born to parents who are married to one another and stay married until the children become adult, these issues do not merely concern a minority of our people and our children, but are central. Despite divorce and the phenomenon of children being born outside wedlock, how do we enable both parents to share in the care and maintenance of their children? That is a central question. Hon. Members will notice that I said care and maintenance. It is about not merely money and cash, but parental responsibility in a wider sense.

Secondly, how do we avoid the trends becoming forces for child poverty and disadvantage? Instead of having that sensible debate, we had Thatcherite mean-mindedness posing as morality. It was led by the then Prime Minister. I well remember her speech to the National Children's Home. That speech and her emphasis on parental responsibility, which she tackled in her own particular way, was as much a surprise to Social Security Ministers as to the rest of us. They did not see the policy coming—they saw it as a hand grenade rolling towards them, with the pin half pulled out. The Treasury then seized the opportunity—it saw the policy as a major way of raising revenue—and thwarted the Department of Social Security when, I suspect, it was arguing that there should be a disregard, as we call it in technical language, to enable

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mothers on income support at least to get some child support so that their net incomes and the welfare of their children could be enhanced.

The combination of the then Prime Minister's policy and the Treasury seizing the opportunity led to the bad start to child maintenance from which we have not recovered thus far, and from which it will be difficult to recover. I refer to the quite extraordinary catastrophe that the Child Support Agency quickly became. It takes months to make assessments, it has a huge error rate and it is insensitive to those who are trying to communicate with it. I do not have the opportunity today to discuss the Child Support Agency in great detail, but it is appropriate—not least because £16 million of the supplementary estimate that we are being asked to approve today is for running the Child Support Agency—to ask some questions of the Under-Secretary of State.

Will the Minister give hon. Members an up-to-date report on, and the accuracy of, the time taken to undertake the assessments and enforcement within the agency? I believe that such an update would be most helpful. Will the Minister also tell hon. Members how much child support is now being collected and the projections for the coming financial year? In addition, how much of that money will go to the Exchequer and how much of it will go to the parent with care—normally, but not always, the mother?

Does the Minister have anything to say about improving, or developing the human face of, the Child Support Agency, given its reputation for insensitivity? Are there ways in which the people dealing with the agency—whether they are the mothers, usually the parents with care, or the fathers, the so-called absent parents—can be made to feel that someone at the end of the telephone line understands their case and can discuss it with them in a human way?

Many hon. Members are interested in and impressed by the so-called CAST system being pioneered at the Hastings centre. Some months ago, I had the opportunity to visit the centre and I talked to the staff about the system. It is an attempt to deal with people in the round. It would be useful to know how it is progressing. Does the Minister have any plans to expand the system across the country?

Traditionally, complaints about the workings of the Child Support Agency have come from men—the so-called absent parents. I have received many letters about the way in which many men, quite understandably, feel resentful about being called "absent parents". We are still grappling with the terminology on this issue. Given that being a parent is not just about paying maintenance, but is about providing care to children—as so many fathers do in difficult family circumstances—we need better terminology. The term "absent parent" is an insult.

Mr. Frank Field: Will my father—will my hon. Friend give way? The Select Committee on Social Security has suggested that we use the word "father".

Mr. Wicks: I am glad that my hon. Friend confirmed that I am not his father—if I were, I would struggle to pay maintenance on him. As nine out of 10 parents with care are mothers—and, therefore, nine out of 10 absent parents are fathers—we could often use the term "father". However, we must allow for the reverse situation.

Ms Lynne: I suggest that the term "liable parent" could be used instead of the terms "absent parent" or "father". Some liable parents—only a few—are mothers.

Mr. Wicks: I take that important point.

Many of the fathers who write to me or to other hon. Members about grievances to do with child support are often doing their best to pay the child maintenance. However, they find that, when there is a change in their circumstances—for example, a postman may have a higher rate of pay over Christmas but then wants to tell the Child Support Agency that his wages have decreased—it is enormously difficult to communicate with the agency. For example, they can never find one person at the end of the telephone line who will take their point, put it into the system and report back to them in a decent way to say that their assessment has been varied.

We all have the right to expect that kind of obvious sensitivity when we are dealing with a bank or with a building society—I am not saying that we always get it from those institutions—and we want to bring it into the workings of the Child Support Agency. Many men feel aggrieved—and justifiably so—and we need to allow for that in any reforms of the agency.

Many mothers—the parents with care—also have grievances about the way in which the Child Support Agency has not delivered. I shall quote a letter—with care as I want to protect the identity of the woman—from a mother who has recently come to see me at the House of Commons about her situation. She is a young mother with a son, and she was on income support at one stage and contacted the Child Support Agency. She has since found a full-time job in London at a reasonable, but not generous, level of pay. She lives in the home counties. For the past two or three years she has been trying to get the Child Support Agency to find the father of her child so that he will contribute some maintenance. In many ways, she illustrates the kind of benefit-to-work strategy of which we are all in favour. She has a tough life. Her letter states:

"As a working mother, my day starts at 7.40 am when I leave for work; I don't get home until 7.30, when I collect my son from the childminder's. I then return home and have to do all the household chores. This is not a situation I deliberately created—I was forced to leave my son's father because he is a very violent man and I feared for our safety. I even had to have a non-molestation order served against him."

She has told me that she has not received any maintenance payments from the man since she left him. She also told me that this man has four other children, by two other relationships, and that he pays maintenance towards none of the children—a fact that he openly laughs about.

I shall not go into too much detail about the mother and her situation, except to say that, for two or three years, she has been trying to get the Child Support Agency to act. She told me in our meeting that she thought that the Child Support Agency was there to help her and her son, and that she cannot understand why it has not delivered. I was appalled when I looked at some of the correspondence on this issue between the Child Support Agency and another hon. Member. That woman knew where the man was, knew that he was in employment and

believed that he earned about £400 a week. She gave the Child Support Agency the man's address and the agency wrote to the address. The man or his new girlfriend scribbled on the back of the envelope, "Not known at this address" and the Child Support Agency told the woman, "I am sorry; he is not known at that address." If that is the sophistication of the Child Support Agency, we are in deep trouble.

The woman rang up the Child Support Agency one day to say, "I can tell you that he is in employment, because I have heard that he is." The agency staff said, "We shall try to trace the employer," but later told her, "I am sorry; we cannot trace the employer." The woman said, "Hold on a moment, I shall call you back." She made a few telephone calls and found out where the man was working—on a highway, doing construction work. She told the Child Support Agency all about it, but still there was no action.

That story lasted several years. Eventually, the Child Support Agency managed to track down the man and produced an interim maintenance assessment, but made a procedural mistake and had to withdraw it. Two or three years later, the man has paid no maintenance towards that little boy or any of his four other children.

When the woman first approached the agency, she was told by the man from the agency on the telephone, "It will be difficult; he is self-employed. If I were you, I wouldn't bother." The Child Support Act 1991, passed by Parliament with much support on both sides of the House, is not delivering to that woman and her child.

Generalisations are unfair; I know that the agency has tracked down some such men, but suspicion remains that the agency regards as a soft touch men in secure employment in a major private company or in the public sector—teachers, police officers and so on—and pursues them to obtain more money from them, but that many men in difficult cases continue to get away with it. Some fathers are laughing at Parliament, at the agency and at the mothers and their children, saying, "I won't pay anything. I would rather go to prison than pay anything. They will never catch me," and continue to get away with it. That is not what Parliament intended. It has brought the Child Support Agency into grave disrepute because people do not regard it as effective social policy or effective child support.

As part of Labour's general review of social security, we have been reconsidering the operation of the child support system. We reaffirm easily and clearly our principled support for the important principle of parental responsibility, but we are angry and worried that that decent principle—indeed, a guiding principle in the turbulent family times in which we find ourselves—is brought into disrepute by the continuing thoroughly bad practice of the Child Support Agency.

We reaffirm our commitment to the principle of introducing a disregard so that mothers who are on income support, every penny of whose child maintenance is currently taken away from their income support, obtain some net income and net benefit from it. We are not in a position to say when the disregard might be introduced or the amount because, obviously, that depends on total commitments and other spending priorities, but we reaffirm that important principle. If the public and some fathers—some of the so-called "absent parents"—could be sure that a certain fraction of their child maintenance went directly into the pockets of mothers and benefited their own children, we would start to turn the position around and bring what is at the moment a mean-minded piece of policy into the true province of social policy. That is the challenge.

In considering in more detail the workings of the Child Support Agency, Opposition Members have two major objectives—fairness and efficiency.

A disregard would be an important step forward in fairness. People would regard that as fair to the taxpayer, because the taxpayer would continue to benefit from most of the extra revenue coming in. We have no quarrel with that; the taxpayer has a major interest. The taxpayer is not an anonymous person but often a mother or father, struggling to bring up children and resenting having to contribute too much to other people's children. We acknowledge that the taxpayer has a legitimate interest, but we need to strike a fairer balance between the interests of taxpayers and the interests of mothers and their children. We shall strike that balance.

We need to review the operations of the Child Support Agency to seek a way to introduce a greater sense of independence and fairness into the system. At the moment, people feel that they are dealing with a monolithic agency—a grey, bureaucratic agency—that can never deal with them in the round. It would be a step in the right direction to find a way to allow people who feel a sense of grievance that they are not being treated properly or whose family position is so complex that they do not believe that the formula can deal with them properly, an independent review or adjudication. We are investigating that in detail.

Greater efficiency is needed. It is nonsensical that it takes months to process assessments and that, in the case that I described of the young mother struggling to do her best for her child, the system is so ineffective that, despite being given all the clues, all the details and all the addresses by that woman, the agency cannot yet find that man and make him pay maintenance. We need greater effectiveness.

Yes, we support the principle of parental responsibility—I could not have made that clearer—but we need to consider the workings of the agency, so that we shall be able to say one day that it is as effective as possible and fairer than it ever has been.

The major challenge for the House in turbulent family times is to ensure that parental responsibility works, because all our children deserve to be brought up, wherever possible, by both their parents. We need care and responsibility. Saving the decent principle of parental responsibility from bad practice is a key challenge for future social policy.

5.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): This afternoon, we have listened to four very interesting speeches by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) and by Opposition Members. This has been a shortish debate, which may reflect the fact that, in the past three weeks, we have had three major debates on social security. Opposition Members—and indeed Conservative Members—may be suffering from social security fatigue.

Coming relatively fresh to estimates debates, I am struck by how much has changed in the way in which these matters are discussed in the three years since my

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right hon. Friend the Secretary of State delivered his Mais lecture. A copy of the lecture is indispensable to any discussion of social security in much the same way as the thoughts and writings of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who opened today's debate, whose speeches are also indispensable to any junior Minister trying to work his way through the maze of social security.

Three years ago, politicians tended to boast about the increase in welfare spending. I remember that a leading Labour academic wrote a paper called "The Future of Welfare: A Guide to the Debate", in which he advocated that an extra 5 per cent. of gross domestic product on social security spending would do the trick.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) made kind remarks about Government statisticians, which I shall pass on, and said that he wanted to consider appropriate objectives for social security. Conservative Members have little doubt what the appropriate objectives are. In recent years there has been a reduction in the underlying growth in social security, not only because it is a burden to the taxpayer, but because of the growth in the dependency culture, which is wrong. Many of those changes were enshrined in last year's heavy social security legislative programme. We are now enabling the country to meet genuine need without outstripping the country's ability to pay.

I fear that we remain in considerable doubt about the Labour party's views; it is not at all clear where it is heading. All will be revealed on 8 May when the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West and his hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench announce the result of their six-month review—they have been instructed by their leader to think the unthinkable. We are all waiting with bated breath to hear what emerges from that important process.

If we consider the international comparisons overseas, we see just how far ahead of the field the Government are on the issue of social security. In Germany, there is widespread discussion of the problem of non-wage labour costs and the burdens that they impose on an economy that is struggling to reach the Maastricht criteria. Unemployment in Germany is higher than at any time since the last war, and reached 4.3 million in February.

The position in France is no less severe. France is also suffering high social costs, as we know from the vivid media reports of the recent unrest in Paris and other big cities. In the face of widespread strikes by public sector workers in November, Jacques Barrot, the Social Affairs Minster, said: "There is no alternative" to welfare reform. The strikers were protesting against the social security reforms announced by the Prime Minister.

In a television interview in October, President Chirac called on France to follow the

"courageous example of the UK"

in reducing public expenditure. He spoke of the urgent need to reduce the public deficit, especially that of the social security budget. He said that France had lived beyond its means for too long. But in the face of continued strikes and protests, the French Government have had to backtrack on some of their planned reforms: they have given way over public sector pensions and postponed the proposed taxation of family benefits.

I gave those international comparisons as they show not only the extent to which the Labour party is still wallowing about and trying to work out where to go, but how far ahead of the international game the British Government are in tackling those difficult problems.

Mr. Tim Smith: My hon. Friend is right: there is no doubt that the United Kingdom Government are far ahead of the game in dealing with the burgeoning cost of social security spending. Does he agree that it is striking that the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) said that he wanted to cut the total amount of social security spending—he said that it was too high at one third of the total—but every time that the Secretary of State makes relatively minor reductions in spending, the Labour party opposes them?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right, which is why he must make a note in his diary for 8 May, the date on which the Opposition will advise the House of their programmes and plans after their six-month review. I see from what my hon. Friend said that he is looking forward to that day as much as I am.

Mr. Wicks: The Government—faced with rocketing social security spending because of the economic recession and a lack of decent social policy—have made benefit claimants suffer by cutting and withdrawing their benefits. But the proper strategy, which new Labour will adopt, is to get people off benefit; there are simply too many people on income support. We shall have a proper benefit-to-work strategy that will get people off benefit. The difference between the Conservatives and the Labour party is that, under the last Labour Government, there were not so many people on income support or supplementary benefit.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will have to do better than that if he is to convince the House on 8 May that his party has a serious social security strategy, and I look forward to what he has to say on that day.

In his important contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield talked about the work of the agencies and the success that they have achieved. He mentioned the fact that the work of the Department and its agencies is tagged, in an attachment to the Select Committee's report, on today's Order Paper. The report confirms the agencies' success and the improvements that they have brought about.

The agencies' benefits include improved clarification of roles and responsibilities in framework documents, and greater public accountability through the publication of business plans and annual reports and accounts. Responsibility for decision making is devolved to the lowest suitable level closest to the point of delivery, allowing real improvements in customer service and efficiency to be made.

The improvements derived from agency status can also easily be seen by the agencies' customers in the service that they now receive. Better customer service has been achieved because the agencies have allowed improvements in management through greater coherence in control and planning, and through service-level agreements that protect the services that customers can expect to receive. As agencies focus on specific areas of

business, it has also been possible to consider ways of achieving further efficiencies, and each agency is required to identify and deliver a challenging efficiency programme each year.

The agencies are a success—that is easily demonstrated by a range of published figures. But there is still room for further improvements in efficiency, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced the Department's change programme. Under that programme, a key step in our long-term review of social security, we are taking a fundamental look at what we deliver and how we deliver it over the next three years.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) asked me to comment on a leak in *The Guardian*. I do not normally comment on leaks of material, but the article refers to an early document relating to the Department's running costs review, and no decisions have been taken on the subjects mentioned.

The elimination of fraud—which was comprehensively covered in last week's debate and by the hon. Member for Birkenhead today—is not an afterthought. Reducing administrative costs will not be done at the expense of safeguarding benefit money. Our objective is to deliver the right money to the right people at the right time, whereas fraud involves money going to the wrong person. The extra funds secured for the security programme are ring-fenced for use on specific security and control activity, and cannot be diverted. We are committed to reducing the level of fraud by 70 per cent. over the security strategy period and the target will be unaffected by proposals in the change programme.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West spoke about the dangers and disasters of family breakdown. He spoke about security, particularly job security. I am sure that he would want to pay credit to the Government's in-work programme and their family credit programme, which make an important contribution at one level to the points that he raised. But at another level the hon. Gentleman spoke of the vital necessity of the Child Support Agency. I want to address a number of points that he raised on that subject.

I have today laid regulations before the House that pave the way for the trial of an important change in the way that child support liability is calculated. The new provisions will introduce an element of discretion that will allow the Child Support Agency to take account of certain special expenses and other commitments that the standard assessment formula is unable to accommodate.

The new provisions will deal with a number of specific issues. At present, the calculation of liability is governed by the assessment formula. That formula is necessarily detailed as it attempts to deal with the wide variety of circumstances that may be present in any particular case. However, despite the formula's detailed nature, it is impossible for such a system to meet every eventuality.

The new provisions will introduce the flexibility required to allow greater recognition of special expenses and other commitments that are not covered by the formula. It will also enable the agency to crack down on absent parents, principally fathers, who seek to reduce their child support liabilities by diverting income elsewhere.

It will be possible for a parent to apply for a departure direction under three broad categories: where there is a special expense; where there has been a property or capital transfer—a so-called clean-break case; or in other specified circumstances. We shall pilot the measure in the south-east of England, where it will be based on the Hastings Child Support Agency centre. Subject to evaluation and the pilot scheme's success, I hope to introduce it throughout the nation in December of this year.

These changes to the policy go hand in hand with a determined drive to improve the efficiency of the Child Support Agency—the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West spoke of the importance of doing so. The signs of recovery are now there for all to see and the agency's performance is improving in all areas of its work. While improvements may not have been dramatic, they have been steady and continuous. That is not to say that I am satisfied with the present state of affairs; there is certainly no room for complacency. We are constantly looking for ways in which to improve administration and streamline procedures in order to boost performance. Indeed, I expect to lay further regulations before the House in June. They will introduce more administrative improvements—for example, simplifying the way in which housing costs are calculated, and streamlining the procedures relating to reduced benefit directions. As many hon. Members will know, the calculation of housing costs has been lengthy, administratively complex and prone to inaccuracy; some simple changes should lead to worthwhile improvement.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): My hon. Friend may say that I have only just entered the Chamber. Thanks to the wonders of information technology, however, I have been watching both him and the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks)—who made a thoughtful speech—on the box in my office.

Will the housing costs to which my hon. Friend referred include mortgage costs? We hear endless stories of one partner claiming that the mortgage is now higher, while the other—the former spouse—retorts that the aim in taking out such a large mortgage is merely to twist him or her, and diddle the children.

Mr. Mitchell: The point made by my hon. Friend—with which I am very familiar, as he has brought two of his constituents to discuss it with me—is dealt with in the departures that I mentioned a moment ago, which we are piloting from today.

Achieving major improvements in a large organisation that is performing a complicated task in difficult circumstances is not easy; but, although I realise that improvements will take time, no one should doubt my determination to ensure that the CSA achieves the standards that its customers have the right to expect. We are setting challenging targets for further progress, and I am determined to ensure that they are met.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West asked about a number of those challenges. First, he asked about accuracy. That has improved significantly. Accuracy within 1p—that is the way in which we measure it—was set a 75 per cent. target this year; in the last month, 77 per cent. was achieved. A target of 85 per cent. will be set for next year. As the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead will realise, that is a significant improvement in comparison with accuracy in regard to income support.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West also asked about collections. The agency hopes to reach its target for the current financial year of £300 million collected and

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arranged—a steep increase on last year's figure—and will set a target of between £380 million and £400 million for next year. Substantial progress has already been made, and I expect more to be made next year.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the public face of the CSA. Far more emphasis has been placed on the training of staff, to ensure that they respond to a number of criticisms made by clients. In particular, the hon. Gentleman mentioned the CAST system. Following a change in CSA policy, clients who used to negotiate with people who specialised in only one function will be able to deal with a "table" of people who are fully conversant with all aspects of their case.

The hon. Gentleman paid tribute to the system that is now up and running in Hastings. Over the next year, it will spread to all six child support assessment centres. He also spoke of the importance of seeing a friendly face. The fact that assessments are now increasingly dealt with in the field rather than at one of the six centres will help tremendously in achieving that.

These changes, along with the continuing improvements in the administration of the scheme, will speed the process of public acceptance of the principles behind the Child Support Act 1991. The changes introduced by the regulations are part of the process of civilising the scheme that we began last year. We have already ensured that maintenance should not exceed 30 per cent. of an absent parent's income, and the new arrangements will give us the flexibility that we need to provide further help for parents on whom the formula bears hardest.

A point was made about the description "absent parent" or "parent with care": I await a letter promised to me by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), who wishes to advance specific ideas of behalf of the Select Committee. We shall give serious consideration to what she says.

In a most interesting speech, the hon. Member for Birkenhead took us to task for the extent to which we have borne down on fraud. I am sorry if I am misquoting him; I think that he wanted to ensure that our work in countering fraudulent activity was up to the mark. We pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who is almost alone among Opposition Members in taking a serious interest in the subject, and we shall take careful note of what he said.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned landlord fraud. Let me point out that about a third of rents are reduced—in respect of the eligibility rent level—as a result of examination. We are opposed to all fraud. I suspect that landlord fraud is impossible without a real or imagined claimant, but we take the hon. Gentleman's points seriously, and will examine them all in detail.

I believe that today's debate and, indeed, our last two major debates on social security show that the Government are succeeding in containing the growth of social security spending, while ensuring that we have a system that helps those who need it. Long-term control has not, however, been achieved at the expense of the most needy. We shall maintain the value of benefits this year by uprating in line with inflation, at a cost of more than £2.5 billion.

A number of the changes that have been announced will enable people to become more self-reliant—easing the transition from benefit dependency to independence, allowing those people to return to work and encouraging them to stay there. Reforms are making people think about providing for their own future, and encouraging them to join insurance schemes to cater for contingencies such as unemployment, illness and retirement. At the same time, the state will always provide a safety net for those who cannot afford to help themselves.

Social security spending has been declining as a proportion of gross domestic product, a downward trend that is set to continue. We are the envy of our European neighbours in that regard. Controlling growth is important for both the taxpayer and the economy, and, as a result of the reforms, a reduction of £8 billion in expenditure is expected by the end of the century—the equivalent of around 3p on the basic rate of income tax.

It is clear that the whole debate on social security has changed. It is the Government who are defining that debate, and setting the agenda for the future. We wait patiently to hear something coherent and sensible from the Opposition, but so far we have waited in vain.

5.56 pm

Mr. Frank Field: By leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall reply to the debate.

Although our debate has been marred by the Trappist vows embraced by—largely—Conservative Members, it has featured some undoubted pleasures. I do not think that this is the first time that the Minister has spoken at the Dispatch Box, but it is the first time that I have faced him, and I hope that he will not take it amiss if I say that his confidence was matched by his enthusiasm: his ministerial career will clearly be limited by the date of the general election rather than by the extent of his ability.

It was a particular pleasure to listen to what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks). I come from a shipbuilding town, where we still talk about launches. My hon. Friend's shadow ministerial career was launched today, and no one who heard his speech will be in any doubt about how fine that liner is.

I want to comment on three aspects of the debate. In an important speech, the Conservative non-Trappist, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), spoke of one of the gains from agency status—the higher status that it will give individual workers. I hope that that is something to which the Treasury Bench will pay attention.

When I first visited the Child Support Agency building in Birkenhead, I was informed by staff—not the management—that more than half of the new clerical assistants were graduates and that their pay was £6,900 a year. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West spoke about supporting the family. I imagine that it is difficult to support a family successfully if one of the breadwinners, or the only breadwinner, is earning £6,900 a year. We need to think about family wages. Status is not something just to be talked about: it must be reflected in the workplace and in wages. I hope that the agency will bear that in mind.

The Minister showed his skill in talking up the Government's record in cutting down the social security budget. If one did not pay too much attention to what the Government said, one might almost think that they were successful in this respect. If we took ourselves back to 1979 and asked an unsuspecting public whether a Government who were spending what is now being spent on social security, and who had a record of increases such as that which we have witnessed since 1979, were Labour or Tory, they would say that the Government must be Labour because only Labour would spend so much money on social security. This is not the time to argue about how the money has been spent and how it has been skewed towards means testing; I simply want to leave the Minister with one message to take back to the Secretary of State.

We constantly hear from the Treasury Bench about the Government's success in controlling the social security budget. That is nonsense. The Secretary of State for Social Security is a tough Minister, but if we examine every one of the four years of his stewardship of the Department, we find that the Treasury increased the amount that it thought it was going to allow for social security expenditure and that the Secretary of State bust the total. The following year, the Secretary of State again bust the increased level. It has happened in all of the years that he has been Secretary of State for Social Security—the increased budget that was negotiated has been burst by at least £1 billion.

The Secretary of State is controlling the social security budget and bringing it below the increased growth rate of the economy—only if we believe his words, not if we examine his record. If his record this year is like his record for each of the past four years, the social security budget will rise faster than the underlying growth rate of the economy.

Sir Donald Thompson: Would the hon. Gentleman mind if I put that in my election address?

Mr. Field: I should be happy for the hon. Gentleman to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West talked about the need for us to bring the debate up to date. That is similar to the debate raised by Eleanor Rathbone, in the House and elsewhere, on the distribution of income. During the rise of new Liberalism, prior to new Labourism, she said that the emphasis in the debate on the condition of the people was on which social class got what share of the national income. The debate was primarily about which men in which jobs attracted what sort of wages. She said that it was as important, if not more important, to examine the distribution of income between families with children and families without children. The depth charge that she threw into the debate still has to be dealt with.

My hon. Friend picked up on a similar aspect of the debate when he gently reprimanded us for talking about poverty in old-fashioned terms and saying that poverty is primarily determined by economic forces. We approach the subject by asking, "Are we old and therefore out of the labour market? Are we sick or unemployed and therefore out of the labour market?" My hon. Friend drew attention to the fact that, if poverty is measured by eligibility for income support, more children are poor because they live in households with only one parent than are poor because both parents are unemployed or because one parent is unemployed.

In Birkenhead on Saturday there was a "Church action on poverty" hearing. We were invited to listen to people who are poor. The first presentations illustrated exactly what my hon. Friend said about poverty and family break-up, and one of my friends at the meeting—a Liberal councillor—wondered whether we were talking about something new. Everyone became defensive because we were hearing that family break-up was a cause of poverty.

As the debate unfolded in the afternoon, a number of people got to their feet and said that they felt that they were under attack and that we were somehow blaming them for being poor. The debate that my hon. Friend has started today must be approached with enormous sensitivity because we are saying something new which might be misinterpreted but also because people can be hurt by what we say. The responsibility for some of the trends mentioned by my hon. Friend rests with the House, in that the way in which we have spoken has made it easier for people to assume positions that they would not previously have assumed.

In speaking about means testing, I have mentioned people working the system rather than working to get off benefit. I have primarily tried to blame the House for that, not my constituents whose limited opportunities may lead them to work the system.

The same applies to family break-ups. If we pilot through the House divorce reforms that allow people to break the marriage contract after a period only half the length of an average hire purchase agreement, we are sending a powerful message—we think that a HP agreement is more important than a marriage contract. That is not to say that people will not work hard at their marriages; marriages may still fail at the end of the day. I am not pointing the finger, but if we defend HP agreements more strongly than we defend the marriage contract, we are sending a dynamic message to the country. If citizens then respond in a certain way to what we are saying, we should be the last people to reprehend them. We should examine the impact of our actions on the world outside.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West said that we have to get away from blaming poverty on economic causes and must consider more personal reasons such as family break-up, but I hope that we do not fall into the syndrome of blaming victims from the past. We should conduct the debate sensitively along the lines that he followed and look to the future rather than trying to get out of our responsibility for the circumstances that we are now, unhappily, debating.

Despite the Trappist monks who populate the Treasury Bench, this has been an important debate. There have been two good firsts—I was able to hear the Minister speak for the first time and to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West begin his shadow, but soon—no doubt—ministerial, career. We also heard some important suggestions from the hon. Member for Beaconsfield, which I hope the Ministers will note carefully and act on later today when they get back to their desks.

Question deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates).

Business of the House

6.9 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That, at this day's sitting—

(1) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Welsh Business not later than Ten o'clock, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendments to the said Motion which she may have selected and which may then be moved; and

(2) Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates) shall apply with the insertion in line 41, after the words 'At Ten o'clock', of the words 'or immediately after the previous business has been disposed of, whichever is the later'.

The motion is intended simply to provide for the tidy organisation of our business tonight and for a substantial opportunity to debate the Standing Orders relating to Wales—more substantial, dare I say, than the time devoted to the debate on the Scottish Grand Committee, but it may be unwise to make that point.

Paragraph (2) of the business motion deals with voting on the estimates, which is intended to take place at the end of tonight's proceedings. I commend the motion to the House.

6.10 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I welcome the fact that the Government have decided that a debate on the Standing Orders to change the Welsh Grand Committee's workings should continue until 10 o'clock this evening. Had the attitude of certain other Conservative Members been different, such a long debate might not have been necessary and the Leader of the House's comparison with the changes that we made to the Scottish Grand Committee would have been more valid. May I give hon. Members a little background to what has happened on this occasion? It might help the Leader of the House understand why we are in the position where we may debate the Standing Orders for four hours.

The Leader of the House and the Secretary of State for Wales will be aware that Labour Members have long been pressing for changes to the Standing Orders on the Welsh Grand Committee. They have made it clear that the required changes should be meaningful and should properly improve the way in which the Welsh Grand Committee works. They have argued that any such changes should be implemented after discussion and by agreement among all the people involved in the Committee.

I am sure that such an approach would commend itself to the Leader of the House because, whenever he has proposed changes, he has proceeded by way of consultation. Some 18 months ago, after considerable discussion with the Opposition parties, with my predecessor and me and with hon. Members from the minority parties, he recommended changes to proceedings in the House of Commons based on the Jopling Committee's recommendations. Although we want to go further in some matters, the changes have been made on the basis of consensus, discussion and consultation.

It is important for the Leader of the House to recognise that his approach of introducing change after consultation has not been the Secretary of State's approach on this occasion. Therefore, responsibility for the problems that the House faces in having a longer debate on these Standing Orders than on those on the Scottish Grand Committee lies clearly at the door of the Secretary of State. It is not the Leader of the House's fault that we are in this position.

The problem of negotiating changes to the Welsh Grand Committee need not have resulted in a stalemate between the Secretary of State and Welsh Members. Labour and other members of the Committee have attempted to discuss in good faith changes that would be most appropriate. I do not know whether the Secretary of State understands how strong feeling is among Labour Members. Many overtures have been made to him and to his predecessor. Had any of those offers been taken up, there could have been a more constructive discussion on how the Welsh Grand Committee discussed affairs relevant to Wales.

The approaches that have been made to Ministers go back almost a year—certainly to April 1995. The Secretary of State was not in his position then, but discussions were proposed to his predecessor. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) suggested to a Government Whip that changes would be appropriate and that more constructive use could be made of the time available to the Welsh Grand Committee. It took some time for the Welsh Office Minister to reply to my hon. Friend. In July, the Minister said that it was up to the Committee to determine when and where it met and that such things were arranged through the usual channels.

My hon. Friends tried to use the usual channels to arrive at some consensus. Their approaches to Ministers were rejected on all occasions—so much so that, by November last year, when the Secretary of State had been in office for four or five months, my Welsh colleagues decided that it would be appropriate to make their own proposals on the workings of the Welsh Grand Committee.

Shortly afterwards, the Secretary of State came up with some ideas and made a statement on the Welsh Grand Committee, suggesting improvements and changes in its business. Even after that statement, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central again tried to enter into negotiations to ensure that there was agreement on what changes were necessary to the Standing Orders and that best use was made of the time.

My hon. Friends have suggested that progress could have been made had those proposed changes been discussed in the Welsh Grand Committee by Welsh Members of all parties who are most affected by them. I would have thought that that was a reasonable proposition. I cannot understand why the Secretary of State has been adamant that that procedure is not appropriate.

I understand from my hon. Friends that the Secretary of State still has not said why that was not possible. Had we had such a debate in the Welsh Grand Committee and, in particular, had Ministers listened to the constructive suggestions that would have been made by my hon. Friends, we could have had a far shorter debate this evening. We could have had a motion that was the subject of agreement and discussion and that was amended when proper ideas and suggestions were proposed.

The Leader of the House's approach on all these occasions—of trying to work with the people who will be affected by change—has not been followed by the Secretary of State for Wales. If he believed that his suggestions were valid and would work, it would have been reasonable to agree to Welsh Members' request to discuss them in the Welsh Grand Committee. Had that happened, we might not have needed such a lengthy debate this evening. The reason why the House's time is being taken up on these matters is that the Secretary of State has been obstinate and has decided to make decisions rather than enter into genuine consultation.

6.18 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I want not only to support the points that have been made by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) but to add some of my own. The procedure for tabling the motion, the details of which we will discuss later, is unsatisfactory.

For those of us who were able only on Friday to submit amendments, the workings of the Table Office again turned out to be unsatisfactory because, for reasons that I do not understand but perhaps you can look into, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it refused to accept amendments that had been tabled and signed by hon. Members because they were not present in person. I understand that that is the drill to which we work on oral questions, but early-day motions and amendments to them and amendments to legislation are put down in writing. To have them refused on this occasion means that it is impossible for us to have on the Order Paper the amendments that we wanted to debate. That is because the motion appeared late on Thursday, amendments had to be tabled by Friday and the Table Office was unwilling to act.

I should like to lodge a protest on behalf of my staff about the way in which people on my staff were treated by the Table Office when they tried to negotiate on the matter. The attitude was far from satisfactory and the lack of courtesy was matched only by the lack of courtesy in not giving us proper notification of what was to come to the House.

This should be an important debate, but the opportunity for it to be constructive rather than a polarised party debate has been thrown out by the Secretary of State because, within half an hour of meeting the Welsh parliamentary party, the group containing all Welsh Members, he announced to the press that he intended to carry on regardless with the motion. He did not follow the representations that were properly and reasonably discussed by Members at the all-party meeting with the Secretary of State in the Norman Shaw building. The meeting seemed promising because it showed the way forward. It showed that we could discuss issues and move to a constructive way of handling such matters.

We spent an hour discussing the matter in detail and making constructive proposals about the orders, but the door was quickly shut on the overwhelming majority view of Welsh Members. That has inevitably led to polarisation and the issue will be fought line by line in the House. I regret not only that our amendments cannot be debated but that more have not been selected, because there is room to debate many of the amendments on the Order Paper. Presumably, the House does not have time for that.

If the Welsh Grand Committee is to be meaningful, Welsh Members from all parties will have to support the changes; but the Government's attitude has shown that that is highly unlikely and that we will enter a period of entrenched warfare over the Committee rather than proceed on a basis of co-operation between parties. Weak as it is, that is the way in which the Committee should discuss Welsh matters. I am unhappy with the business motion and I hope that the House will divide on it.

6.22 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Although I confess that I cannot and do not intend to cultivate anger on this issue, it is regrettable that the debate, which of course it is procedurally right should take place on these matters, is not taking place after a debate in the Welsh Grand Committee. Much trouble would have been avoided if the Welsh Grand Committee had had the opportunity to discuss the amendments and make recommendations, even if only on an advisory basis. That might have resulted in less contention.

The issue that will concern many hon. Members is whether there will be any significant improvement in the government of Wales as a consequence of the business motion. I do not think that there will be. However, I think that there will be some, albeit limited, improvements in the way in which the Welsh Grand Committee will operate.

I ask the Government, even at this late hour, to consider whether it would be wise to postpone the debate on Welsh business and allow the Welsh Grand Committee, in clear support of the opinions expressed to the Secretary of State at the meeting of the Welsh parliamentary party, to have its say so that we may have a seemly rather than an unseemly debate in the House.

6.23 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): There would have been no need for the debate to take this form had the Secretary of State effectively continued in the spirit of the Welsh parliamentary party and submitted the whole issue to the Welsh Grand Committee. If that had been done, all Welsh Members would have been able to get to grips with the detail and express their views. Having used the Welsh Grand Committee as an effective sounding board, the Secretary of State could then have formulated his proposals on a basis of consensus.

The Government have contrived to have a debate that could run for nearly four hours. Does that mean that they have virtually run out of business for the remainder of the Session and need to fill it with a debate under entirely unsatisfactory circumstances and against a background of deep opposition by virtually all Welsh Members, who feel that the Government are railroading these proposals through without proper consent?

Instead of allowing Welsh Members to discuss the matter properly, the Government simply want a long drawn-out skirmish in the House rather than having to table other business, because they do not have much other business. The Secretary of State had an opportunity to arrive at a consensus, initially through the Welsh parliamentary party and then through the Welsh Grand Committee. That would have concertinaed the process and would have led to a much shorter, crisper debate and could, perhaps, have resolved any outstanding issues. Instead, as will become evident when the matters are discussed, the Secretary of State has unilaterally proceeded against the wishes of the vast majority of

[Mr. Peter Hain]

Welsh Opposition Members—if not all—who comprise by far the greatest number of Welsh Members. He is proceeding against our wishes in a way that challenges the democratic relationship between the House and the people of Wales.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): As my hon. Friend says, the Secretary of State is proceeding against our wishes. Perversely, when the Secretary of State met the members of the parliamentary group, he showed that he had much sympathy with the vast majority of our proposals. Is it not even more surprising that he should choose to ignore that opportunity to reach a consensus and instead proceed in a dictatorial fashion?

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend makes a valid point and it will be interesting to hear the Secretary of State's answer, or that of the Leader of the House if he intends to reply. The Secretary of State approached that meeting in a conciliatory and informal fashion and listened to all the views expressed at it. There was understanding and a fair consensus, and we thought that on that basis we could get the new arrangements up and running; but the Secretary of State has almost entirely ignored the spirit of the meeting and, using his majority in the Chamber, he seeks to impose these arrangements on us.

If the Secretary of State had chosen the Welsh Grand Committee route, not only would it have shortened the proceedings—that would be an advantage to everyone except perhaps the Government business managers, because it would have made a hole in their day—but it would have allowed us to establish arrangements for the Welsh Grand Committee that would have stood the test of time because they would have been based on consensus.

The suspicion must be that the Secretary of State is imposing these arrangements on us because he wants to dodge not just the will of the Welsh Grand Committee and Welsh Members but the will of the people of Wales. Welsh people do not want a half-baked, jazzed-up Welsh Grand Committee: they want a Welsh Assembly. They want to have the ability to express their views through an elected assembly so that their voices can be heard in a way that the Government have consistently denied them for the past 17 years. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), shakes his head, but he more than any other Conservative Member consistently flouts the wishes of the Welsh people in his behaviour as a Minister and in the way in which he conducts himself in the Chamber in proceeding with the business for which he is responsible.

The Government's action will leave a sour taste in the mouths not only of Welsh Members, other than the one or two Welsh Conservative Back Benchers who are not even in the Chamber—where are they?—but of the people of Wales as a whole. Once again, the Government, who take no interest in their wishes, are flouting those wishes and riding roughshod over them by imposing arrangements that do not have the support of Welsh Members of Parliament.

6.28 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I should like to follow and take up the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain). We should ask ourselves whether the proposed changes—if and when we debate them—will improve the standard of decision making in the Principality. I believe that they will not. More paper will be used, more words will be printed and more words will be spoken, but the proposed changes will not make one iota of difference to the quality of decisions. The final arbiter of that will remain the English Tory party in the House of Commons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath was right. Just six Government Members are present, of whom just one represents a Welsh constituency. The Conservative party has other Welsh Members—

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Not for much longer.

Dr. Marek: Where are the Conservative party's other five Welsh Members, even if, as my hon. Friend says, it will probably not have them for much longer? Are even they against the Government's proposed changes? Are they treating the debate with disdain by being absent? What is the explanation for their absence? At the moment, the matter is completely beyond me. Of course Conservative Members know that there is a desire in the Principality for more decisions to be taken there instead of foreign politics and foreign decisions being inflicted on us by people who have no interest whatever in the Principality.

I met the Secretary of State and he knew nothing much about Wales. He has at least taken an interest in it, but only of course during the past six or nine months. That is no substitute for living in the place and knowing it. If one knows a place, one is likely to make better decisions as a result.

Will the changes allow any decisions to be made by the Welsh Grand Committee that it would not have been able to make before? The answer is, of course, no. We know that the Welsh Grand Committee cannot make any decisions.

Mr. Wigley: It is a talking shop.

Dr. Marek: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The Committee is a talking shop, and if the Secretary of State's proposals go through, it will still be a talking shop. The changes will not make any difference.

Although I would like to catch your eye in the main debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to make it clear that I am profoundly disappointed in this short debate on the business motion. I am not surprised by it, however, because the Tory party does not represent the people of Wales and does not have much regard for them. The motion is merely some cosmetic tissue through which the Government hope they will hoodwink people.

I am sure that not only the Labour party but the Liberal Democrats and the Welsh nationalists will ensure that any such deception is uncovered quickly and that the people of Wales will vote for the party that will return decision making—certainly on local matters, if not on others—to where it rightfully belongs at the next election. There should be subsidiarity down as far as possible—in this case, to the people of Wales, the Principality, the regions and local authorities.

6.32 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The Leader of the House should explain, especially to the Opposition, what happened after the Welsh parliamentary party meeting. The Welsh parliamentary party is a very curious animal. It is defunct for years at a time. It very rarely meets, but is suddenly activated—we activate it. I have been tracing the history of its meetings.

The Welsh parliamentary party met in the mid-1930s when there was an economic crisis, to try to gain some degree of consensus and present a united voice on the economic plight in south Wales to Whitehall and Westminster. It came up with some very interesting and unanimous suggestions. It again met during the war, in 1944, to recommend to the War Cabinet the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales to promote the reconstruction of post-war Wales. It also met once or twice in the 1950s and 1960s to bring to the attention of Ministers the consensual approach to various political activities. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), who has just walked into the Chamber, is a living embodiment of consensual politics.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy) *rose—*

Mr. Rowlands: I should like to continue making my point.

The Welsh parliamentary party has therefore just occasionally played a functional role in presenting a case to Ministers. At its recent meeting, a virtually unanimous opinion emerged that we should debate matters first in the Welsh Grand Committee. Given that consensus and the curious function that the parliamentary party plays every once in a while in Welsh-Westminster politics, it is extraordinary that its view should have been not just disregarded but, given the Secretary of State's statement to the media, disregarded within half an hour.

Although we will soon have a chance to debate the orders, I should tell the Secretary of State that we all remember his original statement. I certainly got the impression from it that he was generally open-minded about the shape, character and nature of the revamped Welsh Grand Committee. He invited consultation, and that was the whole tenor of the statement. When some of us wrote to him suggesting variations—I will not raise my suggestion because I have tabled an amendment on it—we received appalling answers. It was quite clear from the two-line replies that the Government had no intention of taking on board interesting variations on the original theme. Indeed, the motions on the Order Paper are exactly the ones that the Government first thought of.

It makes matters worse when one considers that Whitehall and the Government agreed to do something about the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees. There has not been any real consultation on the proposals. There is not a shred of evidence that any meaningful point made by any Back Bencher—in an individual, not a partisan, fashion—has been incorporated in the measures.

The Leader of the House must realise the extent of the resentment felt and why the business timetable motion must be opposed. He should tell us what happened after the Welsh parliamentary party meeting and why no meaningful alterations have been made to the orders as a result of hon. Members' representations.

6.37 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I was also at the Welsh parliamentary party meeting, and at its conclusion I thought that the Secretary of State had taken on board some of the points that were made. He left the room saying that the meeting had been helpful, useful and businesslike. That was the kind of language that he used. Within half an hour he had obviously gone back on everything that he had said, including, "I shall consider further the points that you have made to me."

For all his faults—and they are legion—the Secretary of State's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), would have at least said straight away whether he was with or against us. The Secretary of State handled the meeting with rather unclever deceit. We are not children; we know what is going on in politics, and we are rather taken aback at his attitude. The people of Wales will not be treated like children.

All of a sudden there is an indecent haste to try to do something about the Welsh Grand Committee, which has taken the same form for a long time. Many of us have argued about its form over the years. Apparently, nothing was to happen to it. Then, suddenly, experiments in Scotland were put in train.

There has been a mobile press conference in Scotland, attended by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Prime Minister and others. I hope that the Secretary of State does not think that by rushing the motion through with almost indecent haste and not even allowing a modicum of proper, reasoned discussion—such discussion was evident at the Welsh parliamentary party meeting—he can steamroller us into a similar format to Scotland. That will not do. I understand why the Government want it. They are not very welcome in Wales at present and there is no other way of getting the Prime Minister and other Ministers into various parts of Wales without this particular platform.

I must make it clear to the Secretary of State that we are serious about the purposes of the Welsh Grand Committee. We are here to represent the people of Wales; he is not. He made plain his disdain for the people of Wales in the manner that he insulted those representing them.

There are two fundamental points that should be included in the Standing Orders, but I shall confine myself to one of them—the question of dealing with specifically Welsh legislation. Over the past couple of years, on at least two occasions I have had the bitter experience of being in Standing Committee with hon. Members from the other side of the border who have voted down our amendments. I have respect for each and every one of them, but they knew nothing about the argument; they simply signed their correspondence and voted against every amendment. I had the bitter experience of losing one amendment on the casting vote of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I found it rather galling that the people of Wales should be deprived of the right to Welsh jury trials by the vote of a Member representing a Cheshire constituency. It is not good enough.

Today, we have an appropriate vehicle to amend the Standing Orders and bring them up to current standards. The Government's proposals will do nothing other than exacerbate an already bad position.

6.41 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I worry greatly about the motion. I genuinely want to know from the Leader of the House why there is such undue haste to discuss the matter. I have several reasons for wanting to know that. First—and this is not meant to be a party political point—the Conservative party in Wales starts from a position of fundamental weakness; it has just six Members of Parliament. The last time my local authority went to the polls, only three Conservatives were elected. The Conservative party does not have the support of the people of Wales for the policies that it is carrying out in Wales.

We can argue until the cows come home about the benefits of the United Kingdom Parliament and the position of English Members of Parliament voting on Welsh issues and vice versa. The point is that the Conservative party in Wales does not have the moral authority to impose its policies on the people of Wales. Whenever it has gone to the polls, it has been beaten—in general elections, Euro-elections and local elections. Therefore, it is incumbent on the Government, when they consider the development of the Welsh Grand Committee, to take with them those who represent Welsh constituencies. I say that not because of some ethereal, far-distant notion, but because we represent the people of Wales. We have been sent to this House to argue the case for the people of Wales and we have a majority in doing so. Whatever the Government think, at the end of the day they do not have a majority of Welsh votes or seats at local, national or European level. Therefore, our majority and moral authority are important and appropriate consultation is important.

It would have been appropriate for the Welsh Grand Committee to discuss these issues prior to their coming before the House. Any amendments tabled by my hon. Friends and others will be voted on and defeated, possibly by the votes of Members of Parliament representing seats in England and Scotland. It is important that there is consultation if we are to have a Welsh Grand Committee that is meaningful, that challenges the Executive, that can discuss and reflect Welsh opinion and that actually has an important role, irrespective of our wish in the long term for an Assembly or, in some cases, a Parliament.

I am worried because the Government do not seem able even to let the Welsh Grand Committee discuss its own future and establishment—so what use will it be in discussing the big issues that affect our constituents, such as value added tax, local government spending, democracy, quangos, trusts and housing, education and national health service policies? If the Government will not even let it decide how it is set up and how it arranges its discussions, what is the point of hon. Members going to the Committee to argue matters? We shall know that ultimately the Government are not interested in what the Committee says and does.

It is important that the Leader of the House and the Secretary of State reconsider the motion and whether to proceed with it. The Government should take Opposition Members with them on the motion. That is important for democracy and for moral authority. It is also important for ensuring that the Welsh Grand Committee works and is effective. The trust will be broken if the Government force through the motion tonight without further discussion.

6.45 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will have gathered from the flavour of this brief debate the strength of feeling on the Opposition Benches.

I welcome the speech of the Leader of the House, which I thought was conciliatory. As I am sure my hon. Friends will have noted, his approach contrasts sharply with that of the Secretary of State for Wales.

It is clear that all the parties are unhappy with the way in which the business motion has been brought before the House. Even at this late stage, I ask either the Secretary of State or the Leader of the House to say whether the Government are prepared to allow the Welsh Grand Committee to consider the Standing Orders that will govern its own proceedings. That is hardly a revolutionary request. All we are asking is that the Committee be allowed to consider the Standing Orders that will apply to its own proceedings. Will either of the right hon. Gentlemen respond to that point now?

Mr. Newton: I had intended to respond when the hon. Gentleman had concluded his remarks. Indeed, I have one or two other things to say. In view of what I believe to be the desirability of the changes and the fairly lengthy period during which there was a good deal of consultation, I think that it is right to expect the House to proceed with this business tonight and put the changes in place. While I accept that hon. Members want to go further, the changes are an improvement in the Welsh Grand Committee and will offer opportunities and advantages to the people of Wales and those who represent them.

Mr. Davies: In effect, the right hon. Gentleman is saying that he will not allow the Welsh Grand Committee to consider its own Standing Orders. I hope that he will reflect on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson), that there are 38 Welsh Members of Parliament, 32 of whom want the opportunity to discuss the Standing Orders in the Committee. The right hon. Gentleman is refusing to allow us to do that.

Mr. Newton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in allowing me to intervene again briefly. One important point that is relevant to this line of argument is that these are not the Standing Orders of the Welsh Grand Committee; they are the Standing Orders of the House governing the arrangements for the Welsh Grand Committee. That is why the matter must necessarily be decided by the House and why it is appropriate that it should be debated by the House.

Mr. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman has repeated the error made by the Secretary of State when I wrote to him on the matter some time ago. I fully understand, as do all my hon. Friends, that the Government are not prepared to allow the Welsh Grand Committee to resolve these matters. As the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, these are Standing Orders of the House. What we want is the opportunity to debate them in the Welsh Grand Committee. Obviously, at the end of the day they have to be approved by the House, but why on earth are the Government so set in their determination to prevent us from even discussing those matters in the Welsh Grand Committee? That is the question that I put to the Secretary of State and to the Leader of the House, but I have not yet had a satisfactory answer.

The business motion restricts our opportunity to have a proper examination of the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders. Will the Leader of the House tell us why he is so anxious to restrict debate and to prevent us from even discussing the Standing Orders in the Welsh Grand Committee? Will he answer that specific question? Why cannot we even discuss the proposed changes in the Welsh Grand Committee?

Mr. Newton: Rather than allowing the debate to become a question-and-answer session, it would be more appropriate for me to make further remarks in my winding-up speech in a moment or two.

Mr. Davies: This is a question-and-question session, not a question-and-answer session. We are putting questions to the Leader of the House and we are not getting answers. If he is not prepared to give us an answer or to say, even at this late stage, that the Government will relent and will allow the Welsh Grand Committee to consider those matters, why on earth does he not at least give us a reason? What is so wrong about us being able to debate those matters? We have not had a satisfactory answer on that point.

We are angry about the business motion for this reason. Although the debate on the Standing Orders would have been allowed to run its full course in the Welsh Grand Committee, on the Floor of the House, it will be restricted by the business motion.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the Leader of the House gave one answer to explain why he did not wish the debate to take place in the Welsh Grand Committee? He said that he thought that it would delay proceedings and that he wanted to move on. Is not the truth that if the Secretary of State had acceded to the wishes of the parliamentary group, so that we could have debated the matter in the Welsh Grand Committee, it would have been dealt with by now and the changes in the Standing Orders would already have been delivered? It is not we but the Government who are delaying the procedures.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend understands the usual channels in a way to which I could not possibly aspire. However, I recall a meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee in Cardiff in 1993, when we urged the Government to accept the changes.

I contrast the procedures that we are being invited to follow, by means of the business motion, with the procedures that were followed when the Welsh Grand Committee was established. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who spoke earlier, is an historian of great note. He drew my attention to the proceedings of the Select Committee on Procedure, which met in July 1958, when the Welsh Grand Committee was established. Our debate later will concern amendments to those Standing Orders. I refer to three brief points of note.

First, the Committee received evidence from Mr. Ness Edwards, who recommended the establishment of a Welsh Grand Committee—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] Hon. Members ask who he was. He was a former Member of Parliament for Caerphilly; he was my predecessor but two. He was a man of great distinction and I think that it is necessary that I, as one of his successors, should try to take forward the advantages that he brought to us as Welsh citizens. It was his submission to the Procedure Committee that established the Welsh Grand Committee as we know it now.

Secondly, it is interesting to look at the Committee's proceedings. The Welsh Grand Committee was established by means of a detailed cross-party examination of the submissions. The business motion tonight will prevent Welsh Members and the Procedure Committee from undertaking that detailed, cross-party examination of the procedures of the Welsh Grand Committee, although that is just the sort of examination that is necessary to create a consensus. If the Leader of the House has a moment or two to spare from his onerous tasks, he will do well to read the proceedings of the Procedure Committee in 1958.

Thirdly, the Welsh Grand Committee was established before the office of Secretary of State for Wales. Since 1964, under Conservative and Labour Governments, there has been enormous administrative devolution and the Welsh Office has grown beyond all recognition. Surely, if there was a case in 1958 for a properly structured Welsh Grand Committee, there is an even stronger case in 1996 for a proper Welsh Grand Committee to examine matters relating to Wales and to monitor the procedures of the Welsh Office.

We oppose the business motion because, despite the assertion made by the Leader of the House, the change to the Standing Orders has not been the subject of proper consultation. I do not know what the Leader of the House means by consultation, but I know what I mean. I believe that consultation means that people, in good faith, make proposals for change, that those proposals are discussed and that when it is possible, on the basis of that discussion, agreement is reached. We have not had such consultation.

I do not know what the Leader of the House has been told by the Secretary of State for Wales. I can assure him that 32 Welsh Members have had no meaningful consultation on the proposed changes. I hope that the Leader of the House now fully understands that there is no agreement on the matter between Welsh Members and the Secretary of State. The wishes of the majority of Welsh Members have been ignored so far. If the business motion is accepted, they will be prevented from expressing their views later this evening.

Some of my hon. Friends have already referred to the Welsh parliamentary party. We met on 20 February, and I hope that the Leader of the House can offer an explanation for what occurred. By all accounts, it was a very cordial meeting, apart from the fact that the Government Whip was excluded from the proceedings because he had not sought an invitation. It was a matter of great embarrassment to him, but it gave great merriment to the rest of us. The meeting then proceeded in a cordial and good-natured way. At the end, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) pointed out, the Secretary of State left the room saying, "Yes, I shall consider the matter. I hope that if any of you have further submissions to make, you will make them and I shall give the matter further consideration."

Within an hour, I was telephoned by a BBC journalist, who said that the Secretary of State had given an interview in which he had announced that the proposed

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changes to the Standing Orders would not be considered by the Welsh Grand Committee, but would be taken on the Floor of the House. I ask the Leader of the House a direct question. Does he think that that is the way in which the matter should be conducted between the Government and the Opposition? Does he think that that is a fit, appropriate and courteous way for a Secretary of State to conduct himself, especially when he does not represent a Welsh constituency and can muster, at best, only six Members out of 38?

I wrote to the Secretary of State on the following day, 21 February, to express my concern, to ask him to reconsider his decision and to ask him to allow the matter to go to the Welsh Grand Committee. I still have not had a reply from the Secretary of State. Does the Leader of the House think that that is an appropriate way for one of his Cabinet colleagues to conduct business? I certainly do not.

Mr. Wigley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the Secretary of State had taken on board all the points that were made at the meeting of the parliamentary party and if he had said, "I have met all the points, so there is no need to go through the Welsh Grand Committee; I am willing to change the proposals to take those points on board," he would have made a comprehensible defence? To close the door, to refuse to back the changes that were asked for at the meeting and to support the business motion is, to all intents and purposes, to tell us that it was a total waste of time to have the meeting of the Welsh parliamentary party.

Mr. Davies: Very much so. It is my personal regret that the Secretary of State did not have the courage or the courtesy to tell us that to our faces at the meeting in Norman Shaw. He must have been set in his mind then, so why on earth did he not have the courtesy or the courage to tell us that that was the case rather than sneaking out and giving a BBC interview half an hour later?

I also oppose the business motion because it institutionalises conflict. I hope that the Leader of the House now understands that if we had been able to deal with the matter in the way that we wished, we could have reached agreement. There is a need to reform the procedures of the Welsh Grand Committee; everyone understands that. As a result of the business motion, there will be unnecessary confrontation with the Opposition. The procedures of the House are rigid and formal. We shall not be able to have the flexibility—the give and take—that we could have had in the Welsh Grand Committee. The business motion denies us that opportunity. Undoubtedly, the motion that will be put to the House at 10 o'clock will not command the broad support of Welsh Members. Indeed, it is a missed opportunity to reform the Welsh Grand Committee.

Those arguments underscore the fundamental divide between Welsh Members who represent Welsh constituencies and the Secretary of State. There is no doubt that Opposition Members have a genuine desire to improve democracy in Wales, but the business motion prevents us from doing so. There is a genuine desire to have better and more accountable government in Wales. The business motion will prevent us from having that debate. There is a genuine desire to have more efficient government, less corrupt government and a Government who reflect the wishes of the people. The business motion will prevent us from developing that argument. There are four hon. Members on the Conservative Benches who represent Welsh constituencies, but it is quite clear that they do not share our aspirations.

As an Opposition, we have always been constructive in this matter. To my knowledge, as far back as 8 March 1993, when the Welsh Grand Committee met in Cardiff to discuss the governance of Wales, the Opposition suggested to the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), how we could restructure the Welsh Grand Committee. We were then debating the reorganisation of local government. We asked the Government why on earth, if they wished to proceed with it, they did not put the matter before the Welsh Grand Committee. Their response some months later was to deny Welsh Members of Parliament by repealing Standing Order No. 86—which is what the motion before us does—and to prevent Welsh Members from sitting on the Committee, which, above all else, was discussing local government in Wales.

Instead of putting Welsh Members on the Committee, the Government included luminaries such as the hon. Members for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), who came to something of a sticky end, for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg)—a fine record he has in Westminster—and for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), who had no Welsh interests apart from a property that he owned in Powys.

The debate is not about devolution, which is not on the agenda tonight. The Government know our position on that, which is clear and unequivocal. The debate is about reforming the procedures of the Welsh Grand Committee. We want workable, meaningful changes. We want it to be given proper powers, not only to debate and to question the Government—when we do that, the Government can run away from the arguments, as they have done tonight—but to decide matters. If there is a difference between the Government and the Opposition on the handling of the Welsh Grand Committee, it is down to that.

The Government currently hold all the cards. They decide all the matters and want to keep the cards in their hands. They make the arrangements for the Welsh Grand Committee. They control its agenda and always have the last word in it. They refuse it the power to decide any matters. The business motion will curtail debate to about two hours, but that is not enough time to explore those matters, particularly on the Floor of the House. The motion will deprive Welsh Members of Parliament of any opportunity to seek a consensus on how the procedures of the Committee could be improved. Thanks to the motion, there will be artificial votes. Those of us who sit on the Welsh Grand Committee, who represent Welsh constituencies and have a vested interest in ensuring that we get it right tonight, will be outvoted by Conservative Members, who will be whipped at 10 o'clock to deny us our rights.

For those reasons, we oppose the business motion and shall seek to divide the House.

7.3 pm

Mr. Newton: I thought that the debate started rather promisingly, when the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor)—I thank her for this—spent a great deal of

time saying what a reasonable man I was. However, it has gone steadily downhill from there, but I shall try to remain reasonable in my brief winding-up speech.

I do not accept, however grateful I am for the remarks about me, the contrast that has been drawn with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. It is certainly not a breach of confidence—I do not think that anybody would mind me saying this—to say that being, as I am, quite keen to see this particular improvement, as I see it, in the procedures of the House advanced as soon as possible, I had a sketch plan of business a week before Christmas. I offered my right hon. Friend the opportunity to proceed with the changes that he had outlined—which, generally, appeared to have been welcomed—to the Standing Orders that govern the Welsh Grand Committee. He declined, saying that he did not want the opportunity to debate the business at that time, precisely because he wished to go through a process of discussion and consultation with other Welsh Members of Parliament.

I understand that my right hon. Friend wrote to the hon. Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), and to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 14 December, explaining exactly what changes he proposed to introduce, offering a meeting to discuss them and asking their agreement. Thereafter, there was a considerable exchange of correspondence, and, as has been acknowledged, something rare happened: there was a meeting of the Welsh parliamentary party—a gathering of all hon. Members who represent constituencies in Wales—which my right hon. Friend attended. I accept that there appears to have been some misunderstanding in the wake of that meeting. My understanding is that my right hon. Friend had always made it clear that changes to the Standing Orders of the House were matters for debate on the Floor of the House. That appears to be the main point of disagreement.

Mr. Ron Davies: Whatever faults we might have as Welsh Members of Parliament, I can assure the Leader of the House that we never let the Secretary of State leave any of our meetings under any misapprehension of our true feelings. May I clarify one point and ensure that *Hansard* records what happened? It is quite correct that the Secretary of State wrote to me and other hon. Members on 14 December, but the Leader of the House has just suggested that, in that letter, the Secretary of State offered a meeting. That is not correct.

If the Leader of the House consults the Secretary of State and looks at the correspondence, he will find that the Secretary of State did not write to me, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who represents Plaid Cymru, and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who represents the Liberal Democrats, until 31 January. I now ask the right hon. Gentleman to reconsider his point, because that is very important.

Mr. Newton: I understand—I gather that it is my right hon. Friend's recollection—that my right hon. Friend offered a meeting at that stage, but if there has been any misunderstanding about that, I am sure that my right hon. Friend will want to clear it up when he speaks in the debate, which I hope that we shall get on to before much longer.

Mr. Llwyd: On the question of misunderstanding, the Leader of the House is at a disadvantage, because he was not at that meeting. I was, and I think that we all have a similar recollection. We all understand that, for any effective change to be introduced, there has to be a change in the Standing Orders of the House. We need not be experts in "Erskine May" to work that one out. The point is that the Secretary of State left the meeting with the firm impression that he was considering actively all the points that had been raised, none of which now appears on the Order Paper.

Mr. Newton: We are, are we not, in effect talking about two different things. There seem to be differences of perception about the meeting, which, as the hon. Gentleman says, I did not have the advantage—if that is the correct word—of attending. My right hon. Friend's understanding, if I may speak for him further, is that he had consistently made clear his expectation that the matter would be debated on the Floor of the House.

Clearly, there are also a number of other disagreements about what should be in the Standing Orders, on which, of course, my right hon. Friend has reflected, but that is a somewhat different matter. Of course it is the case, as it was in relation to the changes in the Standing Orders for the Scottish Grand Committee, that some hon. Members would wish to go further than my right hon. Friend proposed or make more extensive changes to the Standing Orders, but it has certainly been my understanding, and, I think, that of my right hon. Friend, that there was general support for changes that at least go as far as the ones that have been proposed.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): With respect, the Leader of the House quibbles on the wrong point. Everyone understands that the Standing Orders are a matter for the decision of the House, but the suggestion was that there should be proper discussion and consultation by the Secretary of State in the Welsh Grand Committee before proposals were brought to the Floor of the House. It is a sign of the generosity of my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), Labour Members and other Opposition Members that we were prepared to meet the Secretary of State in the Welsh parliamentary party and to suggest a proper and sensible debate, and did not reject his right to make suggestions in the first place.

Mr. Newton: Given that we have been accused of resisting debate or attempting to muzzle Members of Parliament representing Wales, I must make the point that all members of the Welsh Grand Committee, by definition, are Members of the House. There is nothing to prevent any Member who wishes to do so from seeking to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the debate that I hope will take place. We have provided in the business motion, although some of the time for debate has now been consumed by the debate on that motion, significantly more time than would normally be provided for debate on such matters, precisely in order to enable Welsh Members to have a proper debate.

I believe that we should accept the business motion and get on with that debate.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 162, Noes 61.

Division No. 70] **[7.10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bellingham, Henry
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Trend, Michael
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Michael Bates.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Fyfe, Maria
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Michael, Alun
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Rowlands, Ted
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Peter Hain.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, at this day's sitting—

(1) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Welsh Business not later than Ten o'clock, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendments to the said Motion which she may have selected and which may then be moved; and

(2) Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates) shall apply with the insertion in line 41, after the words 'At Ten o'clock', of the words 'or immediately after the previous business has been disposed of, whichever is the later'.

Welsh Business

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Before I call the Minister to move the motion on Welsh business, I should say that debate will take place jointly on the motion and on the various amendments selected by Madam Speaker. The amendments will be moved formally at 10 pm.

7.22 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move, That—

(1) Standing Order No. 98 (Welsh Grand Committee) shall be repealed and Standing Orders A to G below shall have effect;

(2) Standing Order No. 87 (Attendance of law officers and ministers in standing committees) shall be amended, in line 9, after "business))", by inserting "or a motion in the Welsh Grand Committee under Standing Order (Welsh Grand Committee (composition and business))";

(3) Standing Order No. 89 (Procedure in standing committees) shall be amended, in line 3, after "business))", by inserting "Standing Order (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings))"; and

(4) other Standing Orders shall have effect subject to the foregoing provisions of this Order.

A. Welsh Grand Committee (composition and business)

(1) There shall be a standing committee called the Welsh Grand Committee, which shall consist of all Members representing Welsh constituencies, together with not more than five other Members nominated by the Committee of Selection, which shall have power from time to time to discharge the Members so nominated by it and to appoint others in substitution for those discharged.

(2) The business of the committee shall include—

(a) questions tabled in accordance with Standing Order B (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer));

(b) short debates held in accordance with Standing Order C (Welsh Grand Committee (short debates));

(c) ministerial statements proceeded with under Standing Order D (Welsh Grand Committee (ministerial statements));

(d) Bills referred to it in accordance with Standing Order E (Welsh Grand Committee (Bills));

(e) such specified matters relating exclusively to Wales as may be referred to it in accordance with Standing Order F (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)); and

(f) motions for the adjournment of the committee, made under paragraph (5) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)).

(3) Any Minister of the Crown, being a Member of the House, though not a member of the committee, may take part in the deliberations of the committee and may make a motion, but shall not vote or be counted in the quorum.

B. Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)

(1) Notices of questions for oral answer in the Welsh Grand Committee by Welsh Office ministers on a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)) may be given by members of the committee in the Table Office.

(2) Notices of questions given under this order shall bear an indication that they are for oral answer in the Welsh Grand Committee.

(3) No more than one notice of a question may be given under this order by any member of the committee for each day specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)) for the taking of questions.

(4) On any day so specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)), questions shall be taken at the commencement of the sitting; no such question shall be taken later than half an hour after the commencement of the proceedings thereon; and replies to questions not reached shall be printed with the *Official Report* of the committee's debates for that day.

(5) Notices of questions under this order may be given 10 sitting days before that on which an answer is desired:

Provided that when it is proposed that the House shall adjourn for a period of fewer than four days, any day during that period (other than a Saturday or a Sunday) shall be counted as a sitting day for the purposes of the calculation made under this paragraph.

C. Welsh Grand Committee (short debates)

(1) Notices of subjects to be raised in short debates in the Welsh Grand Committee, on a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)), may be given by members of the committee in the Table Office.

(2) Subjects of which notice is given under paragraph (1) of this order must relate to Wales.

(3) Not more than one notice of a subject may be given under this order by any member of the committee for each day specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)) for the holding of short debates.

(4) On any day so specified such debates shall be held at the commencement of the sitting or, if the order under paragraph (1) specifies also the taking of questions on that day, immediately after questions.

(5)(a) No Member except the Minister of the Crown replying to the debate shall be called to speak later than half an hour after the commencement of the first such debate.

(b) The Member who gave notice of the subject and the Minister of the Crown replying to the debate may each speak for five minutes. Other Members may speak for three minutes.

(c) The chairman may direct any Member who exceeds the limits in sub-paragraph (b) to resume his seat forthwith.

(6) Notice of subjects under this order may be given 10 sitting days before that on which they are sought to be raised:

Provided that when it is proposed that the House shall adjourn for a period of fewer than four days, any day during that period (other than a Saturday or a Sunday) shall be counted as a sitting day for the purposes of the calculation made under this paragraph.

D. Welsh Grand Committee (ministerial statements)

(1) The chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee may permit a Minister of the Crown, whether or not a Member of the House, to make a statement, of which prior notice has been given to him, on a matter relating to Wales, and to answer questions thereon put by members of the committee.

(2) Ministerial statements may be made—

(a) at the commencement of a sitting; or

(b) if questions are taken, immediately after the conclusion of proceedings thereon; or

(c) if short debates are held, immediately after the conclusion of those proceedings.

(3) Proceedings under this order shall be brought to a conclusion at the discretion of the chairman.

(4) A Minister of the Crown making a statement under paragraph (1) of this order, who is not a Member of the House, may not do so from the body of the committee; and shall not vote, make any motion or be counted in the quorum.

E. Welsh Grand Committee (Bills)

(1) A motion, of which at least 10 days' notice has been given, may be made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business, that a public Bill be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee, and the question thereupon shall be put forthwith; and

[Mr. Tony Newton]

if, on the question being put, not fewer than 20 Members rise in their places and signify their objection thereto, the Speaker shall declare that the noes have it:

Provided that no such notice shall be given until the Bill has been printed and delivered to the Vote Office.

(2) The committee shall report to the House either that it recommends that the Bill ought to be read a second time or that it recommends that the Bill ought not to be read a second time, and in the latter case it shall have power to state its reasons for so recommending.

(3) Upon a motion being made for the second reading of a Bill reported from the committee, the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

F. Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)

(1) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business to the effect that a specified matter or matters relating exclusively to Wales be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration, and the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

(2) If such a motion be agreed to, the committee shall consider the matter or matters referred to it and shall report only that it has considered the said matter or matters.

G. Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)

(1) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown providing (or varying previous provision) for the Welsh Grand Committee—

(a) to sit on specified days at a specified place in Wales, the sitting commencing, and proceedings being interrupted, at such hours as shall be specified;

(b) to sit on other specified days at Westminster at half-past 10 o'clock, or at half-past 10 o'clock and between 4 o'clock and 6 o'clock;

(c) to take questions under Standing Order B (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) on certain of the days specified under paragraph (a) or paragraph (b) above; and

(d) to hold short debates under Standing Order C (Welsh Grand Committee (short debates)) on certain of the days so specified;

(e) to consider specified Bills which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order E (Welsh Grand Committee (Bills)) on certain of the days so specified; and

(f) to consider specified matters which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order F (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales) on certain of the days so specified;

and the Speaker shall put forthwith the question on such a motion, which may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that nothing in this order shall prevent the committee from considering further at a sitting at Westminster business adjourned at a previous sitting in Wales, nor from considering at a sitting in Wales business adjourned at a sitting at Westminster.

(2) The provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), so far as they relate to the naming of a day in respect of business by the Member appointed chairman and the committee's appointment of future days in respect of business not completed at a sitting, shall not apply to the Welsh Grand Committee.

(3) The chairman shall interrupt proceedings (other than on a motion made under paragraph (5) below) at the time specified in relation to the sitting by an order made under paragraph (1) above or, in the absence of such provision, at one o'clock, subject to paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees).

(4) At the moment of interruption, proceedings under consideration and not disposed of shall stand adjourned.

(5) After the interruption of proceedings, or on the completion of the business appointed for consideration at that sitting, whichever is the earlier, a motion for the adjournment of the committee may be made by a Minister of the Crown, and, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees) the chairman shall, not later than half an hour after the motion has been made, adjourn the committee without putting any question; and in respect of business taken under this paragraph, the quorum of the committee shall be three.

The motion gives effect to the proposals that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales announced on 30 November for extending and enhancing the role of the Welsh Grand Committee. The Committee will be able to deal with a wider range of business, not only here in Westminster but at a range of locations in the Principality and as a result will play a more prominent role in the parliamentary consideration of Welsh affairs.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon) *rose—*

Mr. Newton: I see that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) is once again determined to let me get no more than one sentence out at a time.

Mr. Wigley: The Leader of the House will recall that I did not intervene in his last speech.

Mr. Newton *indicated assent.*

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful that the right hon. Gentleman acknowledges that. He told the House that the orders put into effect the announcement made by the Secretary of State for Wales before Christmas. Given that he is putting into effect exactly what was announced without taking account of any of the changes that have been discussed since, what was the point of the play that he made earlier of the discussion period? What is the point of pretending that any of the Opposition's points have been taken on board when he is merely putting into practice exactly what was intended three or four months ago?

Mr. Newton: I am reluctant to be drawn into re-running the previous debate, though I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman was one of the few who did not seek to intervene even in my relatively brief winding-up speech. The sensible course would be to proceed with the debate and no doubt, either in relation to the amendments or in his speech, the hon. Gentleman—who has fixed views on the matter and wants the Welsh Grand Committee to be not a Committee of the Westminster Parliament but a quite different arrangement—will be able to put his views to the House.

The new Standing Order A re-enacts the existing provisions relating to the composition of the Welsh Grand Committee, lists the full range of business with which the Committee will be able to deal and provides for Ministers who represent constituencies in other parts of the United Kingdom to attend meetings and take part in debates. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has already told the House—and I assume that this will be welcome in Wales, as it certainly should be—both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer have indicated that they propose to attend the Committee under that provision.

Standing Order B seeks to add to the opportunities for Welsh Members to question Welsh Office Ministers by providing for an additional Welsh Office Question Time lasting for half an hour at certain meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee. I am never quite sure whether comparisons with Scotland go down well, but that procedure has undoubtedly proved a great success in the Scottish Grand Committee since its introduction a year ago.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): The right hon. Gentleman makes a comparison between Wales and Scotland. The previous debate was about how we should make decisions about the Welsh Grand Committee, but when are we going to decide about the Committee changes themselves? Why, after 17 years, have the Government suddenly seen the light and decided to make changes to both the Welsh and Scottish Grand Committees? What has spurred on the Government's interest in changing procedures? What has changed the Government's mind?

Mr. Newton: Nothing has changed the Government's mind. It is part of our constant search to improve the way in which Parliament does business. When we changed the procedures of the House more generally, in the fashion to which the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) referred—my right hon. Friend the Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) was present then—and discussed and implemented large parts of the Jopling proposals, no one asked why we did not do it 15 years ago. Equally, I do not recall anyone arguing that in relation to Scottish Standing Orders, the Scottish Grand Committee, the establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee or the improvements that we have been making to the way in which legislation is considered. We are simply seeking to improve the way in which the United Kingdom Parliament responds to the changing perceptions and circumstances of the way in which the House and its Committees do their business.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): One immediate improvement that the right hon. Gentleman might like to put in train is to allow Welsh to be spoken in the Welsh Grand Committee. A couple of years ago, we had lengthy deliberations on the Welsh Language Act 1993, which culminated in the Government saying that Welsh had equal validity with English. The Government are denying the people of Wales the chance of making the revamped Committee of some relevance to large parts of Wales. That is an insult to the people of Wales.

Mr. Newton: The amendment of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) relates to that. I shall talk about the matter in a moment. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will be able to advance his points during the debate.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Given his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Secretary of State for Wales has been going round Wales saying that the proposals are an alternative to a Welsh Assembly?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—who, as I have suggested, will seek to catch your eye later in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker—has muttered from a sedentary position that he does not accept that proposition. I am sure that ways will be found to put that point to him directly during the debate.

Standing Order C allows Welsh Members to initiate "short debates" in which speeches will be limited to five minutes or less on topics related to Wales. A Minister will reply to each "short debate", which will allow more detailed consideration of a specific question. It should be possible to cover at least two topics in the time available.

Standing Order D will allow a Minister from the Welsh Office or another Government Department to make a statement about a matter relating to Wales at the beginning of a meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee. Again, I should emphasise that, as is the case with Scotland, whether a statement should be made to the Welsh Grand Committee or on the Floor of the House is necessarily a matter of judgment in each case, but there would be significant advantages not least for Welsh Members in, for example, moving the annual statement on public expenditure in Wales into the Welsh Grand Committee. It would give Welsh Members a better opportunity to question the Secretary of State, as well as relieving one part of the pressure of business on the Floor at what tends to be a congested time in the Session. It is now the practice for the Scottish public expenditure statement to be made to the Scottish Grand Committee each December and that arrangement has worked to the advantage of Scottish Members and the House as a whole.

I can pass quickly over Standing Orders E and F, since they do no more than restate those provisions of the existing Standing Orders that govern the Welsh Grand Committee's consideration of Bills and matters relating exclusively to Wales.

Standing Order G has three principal purposes. First, it enables the Welsh Grand Committee to hold meetings in Cardiff or anywhere else in Wales. The Government recognise that such meetings need to be held in premises that meet the requirements of the Committee in every respect and I can give an assurance that we will not ask the House to approve a meeting in any venue that has not been thoroughly evaluated by the House authorities and found to be suitable.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): To return to the question of the Welsh language, the Leader of the House will know that many of the venues that are being suggested have translation equipment. It would be perfectly natural for him to agree that an experiment could be undertaken, so that when the Welsh Grand Committee met in chambers where translation equipment was available, Welsh could be used. If the amendments are defective, which we would understand, are the Government prepared to accept the principle of Welsh being used in the Welsh Grand Committee?

Mr. Newton: May I return to that? I promise the hon. Gentleman that I will comment on it, but it would probably be more helpful to the House if I completed my brief description of the Standing Orders before doing so.

The second purpose of Standing Order G is to provide for a calendar specifying the dates, times and places of meetings of the Committee, together with the business to be taken at each meeting. If the House agrees to the motion, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for

[Mr. Newton]

Wales hopes to table a motion in the near future setting out a proposed timetable of meetings for the rest of this Session.

Thirdly, that part of the Standing Order gives a further opportunity for Welsh Members to raise matters on behalf of their constituents by providing for a half-hour Adjournment debate to be held at the conclusion of the business set down for each sitting of the Committee, as happens at the end of each sitting of the House. In addition, the motion makes some purely consequential amendments to two existing Standing Orders.

Finally, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr Davies) pressed me on the possible use of the Welsh language in the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee—the hon. Member for Caernarfon also pressed me on that on behalf of the Welsh nationalists. A number of representations were undoubtedly made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on that point—my right hon. Friend has made that clear to me—in the course of what turned out to be the somewhat contentious consultations that preceded the bringing forward of this motion.

As the hon. Member for Caernarfon knows, even though he gave us some trouble over it—not for the first time, and probably not for the last—the Government have given the Welsh language consistent support for many years. It was this Government who took through Parliament the Welsh Language Act 1993, which establishes the principle that, in the conduct of public business in Wales, the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality. So, I can say straightforwardly that I certainly do not dismiss the point that was raised. However, it is a matter for the House and not the Government to decide. We have to recognise that it raises a significant question of principle since, apart from a few Norman-French survivals used principally for announcing the Royal Assent to Acts of Parliament in the other place and one or two other purposes, English is and has been for centuries the sole language of the United Kingdom Parliament—*[Interruption.]* This is a serious point and I hope that hon. Members will let me continue.

Clearly, there are implications not only for the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales, but for its proceedings here in Westminster, for the Scottish Grand Committee and, indeed, for the Chamber of the House of Commons. A number of practical issues would also need to be tackled. The hon. Member for Caerphilly commented on one—the availability of translation facilities—and others include whether Committee papers, Order Papers, *Hansard* and the like should be produced in both languages.

It seems to me that everyone should agree that allowing the use of Welsh at Grand Committee meetings in Wales would be a major change in parliamentary practice. It would not be sensible for the House to contemplate taking a decision on such an important and potentially significant matter unless every issue that it raises has been properly investigated. The Government believe, therefore, that the appropriate course would be to ask the Procedure Committee to consider the matter and report to the House in due course. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and his colleagues are well equipped to do so and I hope that they will be prepared to look into that question for us and give the House the benefit of their considered advice.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I had better give way to the hon. Member for Caerphilly on the Opposition Front Bench first. Then I will submit to all the other interventions.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Leader of the House has made an important statement. I am glad that he acknowledges the seriousness of the matters that we have put to him—in contrast to the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), who was very scornful in his comments. The right hon. Gentleman has said that he is prepared to allow the Select Committee on Procedure to consider the matter. Since there is some urgency—given the Government's motion—about getting the Welsh Grand Committee to meet in Wales, will he agree one further concession? Would he expect the Procedure Committee to report before the Welsh Grand Committee next meets in Wales in a chamber with translation equipment? That is taking the argument a stage further. The right hon. Gentleman has made a considerable concession on the part of the Government. If he were prepared to go that one step further, he would find—for once—enormous support for the announcement that he has made.

Mr. Newton: Conciliatory as I always try to be—I am certainly seeking to be tonight—I am not sure that I can take that further step, or certainly not off the cuff.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Newton: I am in danger of being made to sound more tetchy than I wish to be if I am hardly allowed to get a sentence out.

I cannot go as far as that. Perhaps it would be unwise even to encourage such thoughts for two reasons. First, I want to get the reaction of my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, to the suggestion of moving at that pace. Secondly, I suspect that that issue should properly be dealt with on a more considered time scale than the hon. Gentleman suggests, unless the first meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales is to be unduly delayed.

In the absence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, I am aware that the Procedure Committee is in the middle of a substantial inquiry into the way in which the House deals with secondary legislation, so I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that assurance tonight and I doubt that I will be able to do so at a later stage. We will certainly not encourage delay in the examination of the matter, however.

Mr. Wigley: Does not that last comment show that the Leader of the House is just kicking the matter into touch? If the Select Committee on Procedure is involved in long-running business that will take time and then has to consider the ins and outs of the question, it will be months—certainly the summer recess—before we get any further and, no doubt, some time in the autumn before a proposal is made.

On the right hon. Gentleman's earlier comments—I tried to intervene earlier—there is a precedent, so he need not make all that fuss about procedures. The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, chaired by Leo Abse, addressed this issue when it inquired into the establishment of the Welsh language fourth television channel. The Committee met in Caernarfon—at the weekend, I spoke to the people who prepared the simultaneous translation equipment for that meeting—and there was a translation of the proceedings, as necessary, for the official record.

Has the Leader of the House done his research on this matter? The principle is there and it has been accepted. The concept was accepted for a Select Committee, so why on earth is it not going to be used for the Grand Committee? Is this just a deliberate attempt by the Government to go contrary to the indications of the Welsh Language Act 1993, which says that public business can be undertaken in either language in Wales—and I intend to undertake it in Welsh?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is being uncharacteristically unfair to me. For once, I feel better treated by the Opposition Front Bench, which has at least acknowledged that what I have suggested is a conciliatory gesture. I am not attempting to kick this issue into the long grass, nor am I resting on mechanical points, such as whether the facilities are available. I am making the serious point that this issue has potentially large implications that should be properly examined. It is the kind of point which hon. Members would normally expect the Procedure Committee to examine properly before such changes are made.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Leader of the House look at the amendment that has been selected—which seems to be the most modest of the amendments tabled about the language? It asks that when the Welsh Grand Committee meets in Wales, and only in Wales, both languages can be used where translation equipment is available. As the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) has said, there is a precedent for this and there are no difficulties for the House in accepting the amendment.

If the Committee meets in Westminster or elsewhere, great practical obstacles and difficulties will be in the way. There is a precedent for what is before the House tonight and it is a modest request. If it is not accepted, the House will be guilty of saying to the people of Wales what it has been saying for centuries: that the Welsh language is not worthy of consideration; that it is a second-rate language that should not be heard in the House. The Government, in the Welsh Language Act 1993, said that they wanted to elevate the language to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been very tolerant so far, but hon. Members are making small speeches instead of interventions. Interventions should be brief and to the point.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North) *rose—*

Mr. Newton: I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman before I reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). In the spirit of your comment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I simply say to the hon. Gentleman that if the attitude of the Government were the attitude that he has just attributed to them, they would not have passed the Welsh Language Act in the first place and I would not have made the suggestion about the Procedure Committee tonight.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Does the Leader of the House realise that the suspicion is so great because it took so long for the Conservative party to come round to the idea of the Welsh Language Act 1993, on which there was unity everywhere else in Wales? Does he not realise that the translation facilities are quite simple? Is it not an irony that we have had a meeting of the all-party British-German parliamentary group at South Glamorgan county hall and debated issues quite competently and easily in both languages, but we apparently cannot agree to have a debate in Welsh and in English when the facilities are available for translation?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add much to that point. I have made it clear that I am resting not on what I might call the mechanical difficulties, but on what I take to be the genuine and potentially large issues that must be addressed in the way in which I have suggested.

Mr. Dafis *rose—*

Mr. Newton: Given the background to this debate, everyone facing me wishes to make a speech. Therefore, I must make some progress in my speech so that they have the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Dafis: Only in England would one expect such a big deal to be made about a simple matter: bilingual provision. I shall explain to the Leader of the House how commonplace it is in Wales for this sort of thing to happen and how easy it is to provide instantaneous translation equipment. I differentiate myself by the point made by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). It is not where there is provision for translation that this should be made possible—provision for translation should always be made available whenever the Committee meets in Wales. It is perfectly easily done and it is something that is familiar to us.

I ask the Leader of the House a question about the referral of the matter to the Procedure Committee: why was it not possible for the Secretary of State to refer this matter to the Procedure Committee as soon as it was suggested that this might be part of the provisions?

Mr. Newton: I do not know exactly when the suggestion was made. However, I know that the meeting of the Welsh parliamentary party—this curious animal that I have learned of for the first time in the lead-up to these discussions—took place on 20 February and today is 11 March. Within less than three weeks of that meeting, at which that suggestion would have been made, I have come to the House with the Standing Orders and with what the Opposition Front Bench has described as conciliatory remarks on the consideration of this issue. I very much welcome what the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) has said about the availability of facilities, which I suspect is due largely to the fact that we have passed the Welsh Language Act 1993.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I assure my right hon. Friend that he is absolutely right in saying that this matter should be referred to the Procedure Committee, because certain points must be considered further. For example, if a speech is made in Welsh, should it be recorded officially in Welsh, or should the translation be the recorded version, in accordance with the usual procedures of the House? Overall, I am sure that the electorate in Wales will welcome my right hon. Friend's decision that his mind is not closed on this issue and that he is seeking further advice in this regard.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. I referred—albeit briefly; perhaps I ought to have made more of it—to how Order Papers and *Hansard* reports of the proceedings would be dealt with. That is a good illustration of the sorts of question that need to be addressed and thought through before we make changes of the kind that are being urged on me tonight.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn) *rose—*

Mr. Newton: Is there some sort of Welsh nationalist policy that all hon. Members have to intervene before I complete my speech?

Mr. Jones: The Leader of the House has referred to the conciliatory measure. Will he tell us whether he has taken a view on the desirability of the use of Welsh in proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee? In other words, is he coming to this issue from the positive aspect that he would like to see the opportunity for Welsh to be used, but he wants the Procedure Committee to confirm whether it is feasible?

Mr. Newton: I have made a somewhat different point from simply considering the feasibility of the use of Welsh. I think that it would be appropriate, with an issue of this kind, for the Procedure Committee to consider the feasibility of the issue and some of the points that have been raised by hon. Members, and also the possible long-term and wider implications of going down this path. That is not unreasonable. Indeed, it is normal—as Labour Members have emphasised—to try to proceed as far as possible with this kind of change through the work of an all-party committee, such as the Procedure Committee, and seek to establish the widest possible consensus, even though complete consensus cannot always be achieved, as is obvious from tonight's debate.

Mr. Llwyd: Not on this side.

Mr. Newton: The suggestion has been made constructively and in good faith. The proposals contained in this motion preserve all the existing powers of the Welsh Grand Committee and give it a significant range of additional functions—they do not detract in any way from the rights of Welsh Members to raise issues on the Floor of the House, in Welsh questions, in Adjournment debates and the like. However, they provide new opportunities that will improve the way in which Parliament deals with Welsh business and bring Parliament closer to the people of Wales. I therefore commend the proposals to the House.

7.49 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Opposition Members welcome the concession made by the Leader of the House. I do not know whether it was done off the cuff or with aforethought but, whichever way it was, we welcome the decision to refer the matter to the Procedure Committee because it is the first concession of which we have seen any sign in our dealings on modernising the procedures of the Welsh Grand Committee. I shall return to that point later.

Mr. Newton: I am in danger of, as it were, breaching my own comments by intervening so soon, but I feel justified in doing so in the context of the evening as a whole to say that, as must have been obvious, my remarks were not made off the cuff. They were made after discussion with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, who very much shared my view that that point should be examined, and represented, in that sense, part of his response to the consultation.

Mr. Morgan: I accept everything that the Leader of the House has said, but ask for further clarification, especially in the light of his last remark. Will he, as Leader of the House, refer the matter to the Procedure Committee, or will the Secretary of State do so?

Mr. Newton: I am not aware of a specific mechanism, but I plan to draw that point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), Chairman of the Procedure Committee.

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful for those points of clarification.

A decision has obviously been made to take all five groups of amendments together in the debate, so that any hon. Member who speaks may choose whether to discuss the spirit of the amendments or speak to one amendment; we will make different choices about that. It is a leek soup and mutton stew of a debate, mixed together, which may make for some untidiness but means that we can finish by 10 pm without much difficulty.

Mr. Flynn: I apologise for intervening. I welcome the Government's concession. Would it be useful for us to agree that none of the other recommendations on the Standing Orders will be implemented until the Procedure Committee has reported on the status of the Welsh language?

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful for that suggestion, on which my hon. Friend may have the opportunity to expand, especially as one amendment stands in his name only.

The spirit of the debate will determine whether the new proposals work—whether they are regarded as acceptable on both sides of the House and throughout Wales. If the House and the people of Wales see the proposals for amending and improving the procedures of the Welsh Grand Committee rammed down the throats of the Opposition Members who represent a very large majority of Welsh constituencies, it does not bode well for the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee. That is why we ask for various other safeguards in the amendments that we have tabled.

There has been a little bit of give on the Welsh language issue. If there is no further give tonight, it will show that there will be no give in future—that the Government do not propose to take the Welsh Grand Committee any more seriously than previously and that the Committee will remain an impotent talking shop, unable to represent the views of the people of Wales on what legislative action is taken by the Government as it impacts on the people of Wales.

The fears that have been expressed were mentioned in the previous debate. It is feared that the Government intend to use the Welsh Grand Committee as a mobile press conference or mobile party political broadcast. Similar criticisms have been made of the Scottish Grand Committee. That is why we have asked for certain safeguards.

Let me run through some of the amendments in the way that the Leader of the House ran through the different Standing Orders.

Amendment (ff) deals with the size of the quorum. We were curious about why the proposals of the Secretary of State or the Leader of the House do not mention a special quorum for the Welsh Grand Committee. The Scottish Grand Committee has been given a special quorum of 10, making it different from usual Standing Committees. European Standing Committees have a special quorum of three. The Welsh Grand Committee is much more akin to the Scottish Grand Committee and European Standing Committees than to usual Standing Committees, which have a quorum of 17 or one third, whichever is less. If one applied that to the Welsh Grand Committee, it would give us 14 now, or 15 after the next general election because of the two additional seats.

The Welsh Grand Committee is not like a conventional Standing Committee, dealing with legislation, but is a general scrutiny Committee, much more like the Scottish Grand Committee or the European Standing Committees, so we propose a quorum of seven. That is also a useful safeguard against the danger that the Government, and especially the Whips' machine in the Government, would seek to exploit the Welsh Grand Committee. Obviously, any meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee requires a much larger head count on the Opposition side than on the Government side. The consequences of the enormous electoral success that Labour has had in Wales and the catastrophic failure that the Conservative party has had in Wales are that the Conservatives, to reach a quorum of 15, do not have to have many bodies away from Westminster on those days when the Committee meets in Wales, whereas the Opposition would expect to have many bodies away from Westminster.

We therefore consider that a quorum of seven, similar pro rata to the Scottish Grand Committee's quorum of 10, would be far more reasonable, more suitable for both sides and a safeguard against exploitation by the Government Whips Office during tight votes, which might hope that many Welsh Labour Members would be stuck in a snowdrift halfway up Snowdon and unable to return to London.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Surely the argument for a low quorum is that the Grand Committee will take no decisions and have no powers; it will be only a talking shop, so attendance is likely to be low. To enable the Committee to continue in session, it must be right to have a low rather than a high quorum.

Mr. Morgan: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend made the point exactly as I would have done, taking the words out of my mouth.

The Boston tea party was based on the principle of no taxation without representation; our amendment is based on the principle of no representation without legislation. The Government must bear that in mind. If the Welsh Grand Committee is a scrutiny Committee and does not have the ability to block or amend Government legislation, it is unreasonable for it to be treated in a similar way to a Standing Committee. That is why we chose the figure of seven.

The Leader of the House made no attempt to explain why the Scottish Grand Committee has a quorum of 10 and the Welsh Grand Committee has the conventional quorum, as though it were a Standing Committee considering legislation after Second Reading. That cannot be right; it is an omission.

We believe that the proposal came from the Secretary of State for Wales. I do not want to criticise the Leader of the House, but as the Secretary of State for Wales did not introduce the debate, he will have the last word at the end of the debate and, as a result, apart from asking him to allow us to intervene, we have no opportunity to ask him why he did not insert provision for a quorum, unlike the Scottish Grand Committee or the European Standing Committees.

The Welsh Grand Committee is not a very grand Committee. It does not deal with legislation; it is much less important than Standing Committees. When it meets in London, it does not set the Thames on fire; when it meets in Cardiff, it does not set the Taff on fire. It probably should have been named the Welsh bonsai committee rather than the Welsh Grand Committee, for the good that it is seen to do. It enables the people of Wales and Members of Parliament representing the people of Wales to ventilate grievances but not to do anything about them. That is why we have made that proposal concerning the quorum—one cannot expect maxi-attendance with mini-importance. Therefore we believe that the quorum is unnecessarily high.

Amendment (a), standing in the name of Labour Front Benchers, reduces the number of "offcomers", to use a Cornish term—Members of Parliament who do not represent Welsh constituencies—in the membership of the Welsh Grand Committee. Unlike in the Scottish Grand Committee, there is provision and, I believe, always has been, for hon. Members who do not represent Welsh constituencies to serve on the Welsh Grand Committee. The number for the Scottish Grand Committee is zero and for the Welsh Grand Committee, five. We understand why.

The Committee would become almost unworkable, under a Conservative Government, if it were impossible to include Members of Parliament not representing Welsh constituencies. Obviously, the Secretary of State is not from Wales, and it is frequently the case—indeed, has always been the case in the past few years—that the parliamentary private secretary and the Government Whip are not from Wales, but the Government also want to be able to pack the Committee with an additional two people.

[Mr. Morgan]

We are not sure whether five is the right number; we recognise that the figure of five has been used before, but we think that three would be enough to conduct Government business. The Welsh Grand Committee has been structured in a way that is already more generous than the Scottish Grand Committee to what might be called country members—is it necessary to have five of them? A Secretary of State, a parliamentary private secretary and a Government Whip should be enough. If that is not enough, why is there no provision in the Scottish Grand Committee for any Members who do not represent Scottish constituencies? That is a legitimate point for discussion and justification, although we shall not hear the Secretary of State's comments on it until the end of the debate.

I shall let my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) speak on the group of amendments that he tabled. We have noticed that the departmental report of the Secretary of State for Wales has not been made available to Members as early as it used to be—there has been a slippage in its production. Two years ago, the report was available in time for the annual one-day debate on Welsh affairs. The Welsh Office departmental report was usually published in late February so that it could be discussed in the annual debate on Welsh affairs. We could then discuss what the Secretary of State was proposing to spend the money on in the forthcoming financial year.

Last year, publication of the report slipped slightly; this year, it is to be produced very late this month so that the financial year will virtually have commenced by the time that the departmental report is produced. As a result of that slippage, the points that I am sure will emerge during the discussion on that group of amendments are important. The Opposition believe that the Secretary of State has allowed publication of the departmental report to slip so that it cannot be discussed in our annual debate. The Welsh Grand Committee can play a valuable role. It is also important to try to persuade the Secretary of State for Wales—when he replies to the amendments—to undertake to publish the Welsh Office departmental report before St. David's day each year so that its provisions can be discussed in the annual Welsh debate.

The last group of amendments which we have tabled, and which has been chosen for debate, involves the legislative function of the Welsh Grand Committee, and is perhaps the most important group. We want to know whether the Government genuinely desire to treat the Welsh Grand Committee as a mature Committee for the discussion of legislation or whether they simply want to confine it to being a talking shop.

If a Bill is sent to the Welsh Grand Committee because it relates exclusively to Wales and the Committee believes that the Bill should not pass on to the statute book, what happens? What would the Government's attitude be if there were a special poll tax measure in Wales, as there was in Scotland a year before the measure was introduced in England and Wales, and if—as would be almost inevitable—the Welsh Grand Committee were to decide that it did not like the Bill, did not think that the people of Wales would accept it, and so turned it down? What would happen to the Bill at that stage under the new Standing Orders? That is the acid test of whether the Welsh Grand Committee is meant to be taken seriously or whether it is viewed as a travelling circus for the Secretary of State, the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Prime Minister.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Will the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to clarify Labour's policy on the taxation powers of a Welsh Assembly? Surely, any decision on the poll tax would be a tax decision and, as I understand it—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman cannot speak about the Welsh Assembly because it is not the topic before us tonight.

Mr. Morgan: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman will have to buy me a pint in the bar later, when I can answer his question, much as I should like to do so now. I entirely accept your verdict, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I can see why the former Minister of State was prompted out of his torpor to make that intervention. We have raised the question whether the Welsh Grand Committee would be able, not to block the legislation, but—having discussed it and turned it down—to prompt a debate on the Floor of the House. We believe that if the Welsh Grand Committee is to be taken seriously, it must be given the ability to recommend that a Bill should not be given a Second Reading. The House would have the right to overturn that decision after further, proper debate—taking account of the views expressed in the Welsh Grand Committee.

If the Leader of the House and the Secretary of State for Wales do not intend the Welsh Grand Committee to be taken seriously, the new Standing Orders, as amended, should remain. Under those Standing Orders, the members of the Welsh Grand Committee ventilate their feelings, blow off steam in Cardiff, in Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantisiliogogogoch, Monmouth, Machynlleth, Pontrhydygroes, Pontrhydfendigaid or Llanaelhaearn or wherever. I am sure that, when the Secretary of State winds up the debate, he will wish to run through that Automobile Association map of Wales, as I am sure that he has been well coached in such matters for the purposes of the debate. I see that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), is leaving the Chamber to obtain some coaching for the Secretary of State on how to pronounce Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantisiliogogogoch.

When the Welsh Grand Committee has let off steam, what is the House supposed to do about the measure when it returns to the House? Under the present arrangements, the Secretary of State can simply say, "You have had the debate in the Welsh Grand Committee." The Government believe that there is a choice; a two or three-hour debate can be held in the Welsh Grand Committee, but the measure must then be passed on the nod when it comes to the Floor of the House and there can be no further debate, or the debate can be held on the Floor of the House, in which case there will be no debate in the Welsh Grand Committee. There cannot be a debate in the Committee and on the Floor of the House.

The purpose of the amendment is to raise the fundamental issue of whether the Welsh Grand Committee is meant to give the Government guidance on

how the people of Wales feel about a piece of legislation. Having been given that guidance, the Government should think again, amend the Bill or drop it. The Government will still have the final say; they will be able to decide whether they want to ram through the poll tax or the Welsh Language Bill because they have a majority in the House. But will the Government take any notice of the Welsh Grand Committee's proceedings? That is the important question. That is why we say that if the Welsh Grand Committee decides that a Bill should not be given a Second Reading, that should encourage, not eliminate, further debate on the Floor of the House to take account of the views expressed in the Committee.

I am hoping that, by the time the Secretary of State winds up the debate, he will realise that, when the Leader of the House made his mini-concession, it was accepted as a significant movement. The Government were saying, "We will not give you what you want, but we will refer the matter to the Select Committee on Procedure." The Opposition gave that concession a tremendous welcome; it did not give us immediate satisfaction, but we welcomed it. We are willing to work to improve the procedures of the Welsh Grand Committee by consensus if there is a bit of give and take. We are not willing to have our noses rubbed in the ground just because the Government have a majority of the votes in the House. We do not expect the Government to give us everything that we want, but we expect some give.

Despite the one small concession that we have received from the Leader of the House—which I accept was given after due consideration behind the scenes and in conjunction with the Secretary of State for Wales—we have been worried that the proceedings in preparation for the changes to the Welsh Grand Committee have not been characterised by give and take by the Government. Today's concession was the first evidence we have had of the Government's ability or willingness to consider what the Conservative party needs to do to avoid a wipe-out in Wales as the general election approaches. That is a serious possibility and the Government are beginning to realise that they will have to make the occasional concession—when they do, we respond well. I hope that the Government have learnt that lesson and will realise that, over the next two hours of debate, if they give further concessions, those will be welcomed by the Opposition as evidence that the Government are beginning to realise that they must not try to ram their legislation, views and changes down the throats of the people of Wales, who are overwhelmingly represented by parties opposed to the Conservative Government in Westminster.

We are not asking for the moon in relation to the Welsh language; if we have a meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee in Machynlleth, Aberystwyth or Caernarfon, we are not expecting the Secretary of State to dress up in long, green bardic robes and utter his speech in 15th-century Welsh poetry. We are merely asking for a simultaneous translation of his English.

We like to think that, in the spirit of the little chink of light that the Leader of the House has given us tonight, the great cry of "A oes heddwch?"—"Is there peace?"—that goes up before the final crowning of the bard in the eistedfodd, which I am sure he watches regularly, can be changed. We hope that it can be changed to "A oes consensws?"—I am sure that I do not need to translate that for him—or "A oes chwaranteg?", which means "Is there fair play?" A little fair play will produce a lot of consensus. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has learnt a lesson from the reaction to the tiny concession that we were given tonight, and I hope that there will be more concessions when the Secretary of State winds up the debate.

8.9 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I apologise for not being present at the unscheduled debate that took place earlier today. I was in Cardiff, on parliamentary business with the Welsh Affairs Committee, and returned only just in time to hear some of what was being said. I think that I caught the flavour of the debate, however. There was an air of make-believe in some of the arguments that I heard.

I welcome the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House in respect of the Welsh language, which is to be treated on a basis of equality with English in Wales. I feel that it would be appropriate for speeches in Welsh to be heard in the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales—although, as I suggested to my right hon. Friend, I agree with him that the matter should be referred to the Procedure Committee. I am sure that finer points are involved, which merit further consideration.

I wholeheartedly endorse my right hon. Friend's proposals to enlarge the scope of the Welsh Grand Committee, and to increase opportunities for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues to give an account of themselves—and for Welsh Members of all parties to hold them to account, as we are empowered to do by this United Kingdom Parliament. It is important to note, however, that, while there is to be a significant extension of the Committee's role, there is no fundamental change in its constitutional status. Its overall function remains to check on the Executive by questioning Ministers and criticising constructively or destructively, as necessity dictates.

The Committee's proceedings will, of course, be reported to the House wherever they take place, and its presence should be welcomed in different parts of Wales. I am bound to add that whether it will be welcomed is another matter; the Committee may well act as a honeypot for publicity seekers of all kinds.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman a question that I asked the Leader of the House earlier? Why does he suppose that, after 17 years, the Government have proposed these changes to the Welsh Grand Committee? Why did the right hon. Gentleman not advance such proposals during his long and distinguished service in the Welsh Office?

Sir Wyn Roberts: On the basis of that argument, no one would do anything. As my right hon. Friend has said, one can always be accused of not having thought of something before. Throughout the years, however, we have thought in terms of improving the Committee's performance, and I know that the Government have been very conscious of some of the criticisms that have been made of it. In any event, my right hon. Friend's proposed changes will extend its scope.

Opposition Members give the impression that they wish that the Committee—when they have a majority, of course—had real power to do their will. That is what is behind all this, and the debate that took place earlier this afternoon. Alternatively, they wish that the Committee

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

had the power to force the Government to do their will. Such a division of executive power would, however, mean a fundamental change in the country's unitary constitution, and would result in conflict between the Welsh Grand Committee and the House of Commons when there was a Conservative majority. I believe that that desire for change and for power inspires Opposition Members.

The same serious defect can be seen in the devolution scheme encapsulated in the Wales Act 1978, which was subsequently rejected by the people of Wales in a referendum, and the same deep fault lies in Labour's current plans for an executive assembly. There is also the prospect of conflict with local authorities, many of whose powers would be absorbed by a Labour party assembly. [*Laughter.*] I am speaking to, and justifying, my right hon. Friend's proposals. I am not speaking to the amendments. There is every reason why I should be allowed to support the proposals, and to tell the House what I think is wrong with the motivation behind the amendments.

The Opposition regard criticisms such as mine of their proposals for the Welsh Grand Committee and an assembly as constitutional niceties—as problems that will go away in time. I believe that they will be exacerbated over time. The Labour party puts its trust in the maintenance of its power, not only here but in a Welsh Grand Committee or assembly. I warn Labour Members that their plans contain the seeds of their own destruction. *[Interruption.]* They will not satisfy hon. Members sitting below the Gangway, and their supporters in the country, any more than the Scottish National party can be satisfied in Scotland. Opposition Members are triumphant in Wales now, but I warn them that their proposals contain the seeds of their destruction.

I said that I would be brief, and I shall be. Let me simply say that I consider my right hon. Friend's proposals to be consistent with the unitary principle on which the United Kingdom's constitution is based.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): The right hon. Gentleman has just told us that the amendments contain the seeds of destruction for the Labour party in Wales. In that case, why on earth does he not support them?

Sir Wyn Roberts: It may well happen after my time. It is a fair warning to the Labour party. Yes, the Labour party has a strong, monopolistic position in Wales, but it must be very careful about how it uses its position. It is already refusing to share any power with the minority parties. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) talked about the meeting of the all-Wales party, but he and I know that that was preceded by a meeting of the Labour party caucus and that everything was decided in advance. The Labour party must not abuse its strength in Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: We should get the whole story on the record. The right hon. Gentleman was present at that meeting, and he voted with the majority, so he was certainly party to that decision.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I did not vote with the majority; I was one of two who objected. May I also make the point that I made proposals to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at that meeting—for example, that the Welsh Grand Committee might discuss some of the consultative documents that the Welsh Office issues. I did not expect him to change the Standing Orders in any way, but I am sure that he cherished the thought that I gave him because I saw him make a note of it, and I am sure that it will be valued for the future.

The proposals should be welcomed in Wales as similar proposals have been welcomed in Scotland. I am sure that they will contribute to the better government of Wales and show the electorate that the Government are sensitive to their needs, even though they cannot always be met.

8.22 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): In his curious and convoluted way, the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) made a bit of an admission. The Leader of the House has also been surprisingly coy about the situation. The fact is that these proposals are meant to be the Government's defence, when the time comes, against a Welsh Assembly. I do not understand why they are so coy and so unwilling to admit it.

Quite a bit of the speech made by the right hon. Member for Conwy represented the beginning of the argument that we shall hear in coming months that the proposals are the alternative, in the Government's eyes, to the Welsh Assembly. Because of that, perhaps I have cast a much more critical eye over the proposals than have some of the hon. Members who have spoken in this debate. I am critical of the context in which they have been presented, because they are meant to act as a substitute or an alternative for the devolution proposals that the Labour party will put before the electorate.

Any student of the creation of institutions in Wales in the past 60 years will recognise the operation of the same ploy. A common characteristic of almost every debate on Welsh institutional change that has occurred in the past 60 years is that the establishment—usually a mixture of Whitehall officials and Ministers—offers substitutes for the demands made by the Welsh people and by Welsh representatives.

I shall give the right hon. Gentleman two very brief historic examples of that. In 1944—believe it or not—towards the end of the war, the Welsh parliamentary party, which was chaired by a Conservative Member, submitted to Ministers and to Prime Minister Churchill a proposal that there should be a Secretary of State for Wales and a Welsh Office to promote the reconstruction and regeneration of Welsh political, social and economic life after the war. The reaction of the Government and the establishment to the proposal was interesting and a classic of its kind. They felt that they had to give something towards meeting the demand, which was unanimously made by all hon. Members in the Welsh parliamentary party, and that they had to assuage public opinion by finding an alternative.

Until the past week or two, after reading the War Cabinet minutes on its discussion of it, I did not realise that one of the most fascinating and intriguing proposed alternatives was that, on her 18th birthday, the then heir to the throne, Princess Elizabeth, should have conferred on her the title of Princess of Wales. That was the sop to Welsh opinion.

I did not want to raise that point too strenuously because of my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies)—*[Laughter.]* It is obvious that, in 1996, as

opposed to 1944, the Secretary of State or the Government could not propose that option because it would be much more contentious than it was in 1944. I cite that case only to demonstrate that a repeated characteristic of debates on Welsh institution making is that the establishment of the day reacts by offering an alternative or substitutes for the demands of the overwhelming majority.

In 1944, there was a demand for a Secretary of State for Wales and for the establishment of a Welsh Office. That demand was made through an all-party group, so I am not trying to make any points in a partisan spirit. Although the Labour party committed itself to the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales and the creation of a Welsh Office in the 1945 election, the Government of the day did not implement the proposal but again came up with an alternative that was less than what was demanded. That was when the idea of a council of Wales was born.

The characteristic offering of other options was repeated at various times in the 1950s during the debate on the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales. Prime Minister Macmillan suggested that Henry Brooke, the Minister for Housing and Local Government, should be given the title Secretary of State for Wales, but backed off when Butler and others in the Cabinet opposed it.

These proposals are a classic illustration of the phenomenon that has occurred over the past 50 or 60 years of debates on Welsh institution making, in that a substitute has to be provided to meet the demand made on the day. In this case, the substitute for a Welsh Assembly is a revamped Welsh Grand Committee. I do not like these proposals because I see them in that context—as a paler version of a Welsh Assembly, to be contained within the context of Westminster parliamentary life.

Let us examine the proposals. They try to recreate in the Committee what we currently do on the Floor of the House. Other hon. Members may support that, but I am not in favour of replacing Question Time on the Floor of the House with a paler version of it in the Welsh Grand Committee. I do not see the point of duplicating a procedure that is available to us in the House. I can appreciate the case for minor statements occasionally to be made in Committee, but I should like all significant and major statements on expenditure to be made in our presence on the Floor of the House. We should not accept these proposals on a Welsh Grand Committee because they offer us a pale version of a Welsh Assembly, set in the context of the Westminster parliamentary model.

For those reasons, I take a more cynical view of the proposals. I suspect the motive behind the proposals, the context in which they have been presented and the fact that they may have been offered as an alternative to the idea of a Welsh Assembly. Why have we not dealt with the problems and defects of this place? Anyone who was in the Chamber during the debate on Welsh local government finance could surely see the case for devolution. There were announcements about a billion pounds and more, and every Welsh local authority was facing council tax increases of 25 per cent., yet only a handful—three or four—hon. Members had the opportunity to make speeches to explain the impact that those proposals would have on their constituents and local communities.

If anyone needed a demonstration of why we should have a Welsh Assembly or why the Welsh Grand Committee should re-examine the way in which it scrutinises the issues of major Welsh public finance and public expenditure, it was provided by that debate and those arrangements. In a couple of hours, we debated something that will have a profound effect on every authority, community and individual in our constituencies. It was an illustration of the House's inadequacies and deficiencies in dealing with matters of great importance to our constituents. If we are looking for additional ways to revamp the Welsh Grand Committee, the first would be to consider the detailed way in which that Committee could scrutinise major elements of expenditure and estimates.

I am an old-fashioned parliamentarian. This place was born to debate estimates and Supply. Wars fought in the 18th century were successful because people were prepared to raise taxation. They accepted that there was a legitimate way to account for it through parliamentary procedure. In the 30 years that I have been a Member of Parliament—30 years at the end of this month—I have seen that principle eroded in various ways, partly because of Europe and partly because of a lack of interest or lack of will to do the job here, within the procedures of the House. There was, therefore, a case for revamping the Welsh Grand Committee to scrutinise in more detail the development of public expenditure plans for Wales.

I do not criticise the present Select Committee, which does a fantastic job. It takes longer-term views than I am suggesting and looks into matters in the broad and the round. It has not scrutinised Welsh public expenditure and finance to the extent that one might have expected but, in fairness to it, it sought a different platform, as did so many Select Committees.

The Welsh Grand Committee should fill a gap in our scrutiny of Welsh public expenditure rather than duplicate much of what we do on the Floor of the House at Question Time. That is the reason for my having a shot at making at least one suggestion as to how we might ensure that that happens. In a non-partisan spirit, I submitted a proposal to the Secretary of State immediately after his statement. I received an appalling one-sentence reply, saying that he would not take my suggestion into account, that he was not really interested and that he was going ahead with his proposal. There was no consultation, and my sensible suggestion was not given serious consideration.

That is all the more astonishing because my proposal would have brought to the Welsh Grand Committee a procedure that we already operate. I was not inventing anything; my proposal is, word for word, the basis on which European Standing Committees A and B operate.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) is a member of a European Standing Committee and I am an occasional visitor. They are among the most interesting Committees. The procedure that they have adopted makes Ministers work for their corn. Detailed documents are put before the Committee and, for an hour, hon. Members can pose any question relating to them. Ministers are made to get up and down. They do not like it—it must be most uncomfortable. I am glad that it did not form part of ministerial experience in my time and that I did not have to go through it, because it is wearing.

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

Ministers have to do their homework in a way that is not required in a general Welsh Grand Committee debate. *[Interruption.]* The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has clearly been through it and will testify to its interest, value and, indeed, the discipline that goes with it. I am suggesting that we adopt the same procedure for at least two sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee.

I suggested that the documents put before the Welsh Grand Committee—the equivalent of the European documents, or directives, put before European Standing Committees A and B—should be specific sections of the departmental expenditure reports, which should be subject to the same scrutiny as material put to those interesting new inventions, European Standing Committees A and B.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I agree with my hon. Friend—I whip the European Standing Committees for the Labour party. It is a characteristic of those Committees that Ministers are unable to wriggle off the hook easily because hon. Members can come back at them and tease out the reality behind the answers that they receive. There are few similar opportunities available on the Floor.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend has a detailed knowledge of the working of those Committees. I am sure that a combination of ministerial and departmental ingenuity maintains the Government line, but it is much harder to do so in those Committees than under any other procedures available to us on the Floor of the House or in other Standing Committees.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Would not there be a problem for the Conservative party if what my hon. Friend suggests were to happen, in that there is such a lack of choice of Conservatives who could be Ministers? It must be a gruelling test—the Conservatives have already had four successive Secretaries of State from England and the Under-Secretary of State comes from England, too.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. We cannot build our procedures around the inadequacies of the present ministerial lot.

I read in a minute from 1957-58 that the objection to creating a Welsh Office was that, as one official said, there were not enough good or clever Conservative Members to fill the posts available. That was one of the practical objections in the 1950s even to the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales.

I hope that I have not spoken in a partisan spirit, but the European Standing Committee procedure is a useful way in which to scrutinise expenditure. It would complement other procedures and, unlike the proposed Standing Orders, it would not duplicate what we can already do on the Floor of the House.

Amendment (aa) refers to departmental expenditure reports because the current Secretary of State's predecessor, when submitting the previous report to the House, boasted in the foreword about the size of public expenditure in Wales. That was interesting coming from the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who is a curious mix in all sorts of ways. He said in the foreword:

> "Public expenditure provision for programmes within my responsibility will be £6,644 million . . . equal to some £6,000 for every household in Wales."

If that is the real level of expenditure per household, it should be subject to greater scrutiny than existing procedure allows.

I hope that my suggestion will be reviewed in the spirit in which it was made and that the Secretary of State and other hon. Members will agree that we should consider a different kind of Welsh Grand Committee rather than accept a pale substitute for the only real meaningful alternative—a Welsh Assembly.

8.37 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) on a strong and well-researched speech. We all look forward to reading the lecture that he has given at Bangor and which includes some of the same material. It was, historically speaking, a persuasive analysis of the situation. When we see the Conservatives dangling half a cake, we should be aware that there is a need for a substantial cake but that we are to get only some of the crumbs.

The question today is why we should have a Welsh Grand Committee at all. The answer is that the Welsh Grand Committee exists because Wales is a nation. The Welsh Grand Committee is given no powers in case Wales starts behaving like a nation and takes decisions for itself rather than having the ability to debate ad infinitum but, at the end of the day, is not able to take any meaningful decisions for the people of Wales.

There are two deficits in Wales. The first is a democratic deficit and the second is a deficit of accountability. The proposals that we are discussing do not, in any shape or form, deal with the fundamental democratic deficit. It might have been possible to try to go down that road by giving the Welsh Grand Committee additional powers. Some of tonight's speeches have touched on some of those powers, but clearly the Government are not prepared to tackle the democratic deficit in any shape or form. There are 38 Members of Parliament in Wales and the governing party, even having won a general election, has only six seats. If it loses a general election, goodness knows how many seats it will have.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): None at all.

Mr. Wigley: Perhaps none at all, as the hon. Gentleman says. The number of Conservative Members shows the Welsh electorate's rejection of the Government, who for the past 17 years have governed our country on a platform that has no support from the people of Wales, pursuing policies that are often diametrically opposed to their economic and social good. The structures of Westminster do not allow the people of Wales even to take a single decision on matters of concern to them.

That was shown two or three years ago in a most lamentable manner when a couple of Bills exclusively to deal with Wales were introduced. I accept that the Welsh Language Act 1993 was a modest step forward, but it

was debated in a Committee that was packed with Tory Members representing English constituencies, who did not have the background to debate the subject or, knowledge of the subject and who did not have to live with the legislation's consequences. They were able, however, as my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) pointed out, to make progress on the language agenda that was agreed by all Opposition parties. Legislation was imposed on us that was acceptable to the Conservative minority and not to the non-Conservative majority of the people of Wales.

That became more evident when Parliament debated the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. From the turn of the century, the Standing Orders of this place have allowed all Welsh Members to sit on Committees that consider Bills which exclusively deal with Wales. That was overridden by the Government to ensure that Welsh Members did not have a majority say when it came to the brass tacks and legislative decisions were to be taken. With these proposals, we make no modicum of movement forward in dealing with that democratic deficit. From now to kingdom come, we will have to accept laws and decisions imposed on us by a Conservative majority. That will apply for as long as a Conservative party receives a majority in England, but it never has and never will win a majority in Wales.

There is a modest movement forward on the accountability deficit. The Government are trying, I suppose, to allow the Executive to be a little more answerable to Welsh Members, but Welsh question Time—one of the tools available to Welsh Members to question the Executive—has already been undermined by the Government Whips getting English Conservative Members to hog the Order Paper on the one Monday a month when we have 35 or 40 minutes to ask questions on Welsh affairs. The agenda is set by the first question that is called and we must ask supplementary questions in the wake of that agenda laid down by Conservative Members. That is why we will have a little movement on answering questions in the Welsh Grand Committee—questions that we will have no time to ask on the Floor of the House.

I share some of the reservations of the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney that some of these issues will be shovelled upstairs, where the press will often not be present and where we will not have the powers of scrutiny or the attention that is necessary. That is why, in terms not only of the democratic deficit but of the accountability deficit, we should debate these matters in an elected Parliament in Cardiff that can make its own laws and not be a talking shop, which the Welsh Grand Committee has been and will continue to be if we accept these modest proposals.

I want to take up four or five specific points with regard to the powers that the Welsh Grand Committee should have. The first is to do with the type of motions that its members are allowed to debate. It is a farce that the Committee must consider "take note" motions, for example, on education in Wales. When at the end of that debate we vote against the Government, does it mean that we have not taken note of the issue of education in Wales?

Opposition Members cannot table any substantive motion that can call the Government or the Welsh Office to account. All we can table is a "take note" motion and take part in a meaningless vote at the end. The Standing Orders should allow us to debate substantive motions that can be tabled not just by Conservative Members, but by any hon. Member.

Mr. Rogers: My experience in this place gradually leads me almost to the same view as the hon. Gentleman in relation to the Welsh Grand Committee. He mentioned education. The comprehensive system in England or in certain inner-city areas has deteriorated, but in Wales it has made a substantial contribution to raising education standards. Although there may be small particular problems, generally in Wales it is of the highest standard, yet we must have policies imposed by English Members.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is becoming a very long intervention.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). I agree entirely. The Welsh education tradition has been valued and developed over decades to respond to the experience of ordinary people in Wales. They have viewed education as a key to improving their lives in material terms and in terms of opportunities and enjoyment of the best things of life.

Over the past 100 years, we had to establish that to pull ourselves up by our shoestrings. At the end of the previous century, during the Liberal party's heyday, and in this century, when Labour has been the strength in Wales, education's importance has been a common thread running through radical politics in Wales. Sadly, that does not exist in England, although I do not make a strong point about that difference. We place more emphasis on education. We need to be able to fine-tune our policies—not just talk about things—and to take decisions in line with our values, which we are not allowed to do in the only forum that we have: the Welsh Grand Committee.

Mr. Rogers: I do not know why the Government Whip is laughing.

Mr. Wigley: The Government Whip would laugh because Conservative Members know that they will get their way. Government Whips will marshal Conservative Members in the Lobby. Whatever we decide in the Welsh Grand Committee or in the Welsh Select Committee, the Tory majority from England will decide what happens in Wales. That is the reality of the mechanism of non-democracy in our country.

In the 1970s, we had opportunities to discuss and debate legislation in the Welsh Grand Committee. If I remember correctly, legislation on the Development Board for Rural Wales was debated there. If we are democrats, there is no reason why we should not debate legislation at Second Reading or Committee stages in the Welsh Grand Committee, but we are not allowed to do so in case we start taking decisions in the interests of the people of Wales and in line with their wishes. We can talk about things, but we are not allowed to decide anything. The governor general knows better than that.

Mr. Rogers: The viceroy.

Mr. Wigley: As the hon. Gentleman says, the viceroy. An hon. Member from outside Wales knows better than we do and he has the troops behind him. It is the majority of Tory Members from England who decide what is good for Wales, not the people of Wales.

The use of the Welsh language in Welsh Grand Committee meetings in Wales has been mentioned. I was glad that that has at least reached the agenda—as shown by the Leader of the House—and that it will be discussed further, but, as that matter has clearly been under consideration for a time, I would have expected it to move further down the agenda by now.

I welcome the fact that the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) is present. He steered the 1993 Act through Parliament. I make it clear to the Leader of the House—I would do so if he were here—and to the Secretary of State for Wales that I intend to speak Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee when it meets in Wales. I will do so in line with the law of the land that has been passed by the Government. That law allows public business in Wales to be debated in Welsh. If whoever is chairing the Committee deems that I am not allowed to do that, he or she will be in breach of that law. The Government should sort that one out before the Committee meets in Wales. I declare that it is my earnest intention to speak in Welsh when the Committee next meets in Wales. I rely on the law of the land to protect me and I have no doubt that the right hon. Member for Conwy will be the first to ensure that support is given to that view.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney proposed using the device that has been developed in European Standing Committees A and B. That would be worth while and we discussed it for a short time at the Welsh parliamentary meeting that some of us attended. I hope that important statements by the Secretary of State that he cannot make now because there is no time can be analysed in an hour of questions and answers and an hour and a half of debate.

I was a member of European Standing Committee B for four years, but I am no longer a member. The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), was in that Committee when I tried to put questions to him and he knows that it can be a rigorous process. No doubt Ministers will try to wriggle, but they get fewer chances to do that when we come back four or five times on the same theme. One can nail them down and then make a speech.

The quorum in the Welsh Grand Committee should be determined in line with the number of Welsh Members—seven or whatever the figure should be. The last thing that I would accept is a quorum that is dictated by hon. Members from outside Wales, which is the practice in other Committees. When subjects are called for debate in the Welsh Grand Committee, there should be not only notional dialogue in the usual channels but an acceptance that the majority of Welsh Members should call the subjects for debate: they should not be subjects that are merely for the convenience of the Government. We should re-establish the ability of all parties to have subjects aired.

The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs is excellent and has carried out much good work under the outstanding chairmanship of the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell). But its reports lie forgotten on dusty shelves although many of the good proposals in them should be taken on board.

Mr. Rowlands: I received a written answer from the Leader of the House on 4 December. I had asked how many reports had been received from the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs and how many had been debated in the House. I was told that there had been 36 such reports and that none had been debated on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Wigley: That shows the breakdown of the intentions that were put to the House in 1979 by the now Lord St. John of Fawsley. There was supposed to be a progression from the Select Committee investigation to debate in the House and decisions were to be taken. That system has broken down because the House does not have the time or the will to address such matters. That may be acceptable in the context of other Select Committees, although I doubt it, but it is certainly not acceptable to Welsh Members.

Let us use the mechanism of the Welsh Grand Committee to make proper decisions and to make sure that the Executive is accountable in some way to the people of Wales. The proposals to tinker with the Welsh Grand Committee do not answer the fundamental problems that are caused by the lack of democracy in our country. The Committee could have been made at least a little stronger if the Secretary of State had taken on board the constructive proposals by Welsh Members in our meeting with him. It is a disgrace that he is not willing to do that.

8.52 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The status of the Welsh language in the House is the same as that of riotous behaviour. If we speak in Welsh in the House, as many hon. Members have done, we are called to order, and if we persist we are thrown out of the House. Many of us have considered that course and it is inevitable that it will be taken if the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) sticks by his threat. Many of us have great sympathy for that course.

The Standing Order that covers the matter is incredible. It says that speeches must be made in English but that quotations in a foreign tongue may be allowed occasionally although a translation should be provided. Where is Welsh in there? Welsh is not English but it is certainly not a foreign tongue. This is the only Parliament of Wales but the ancient language of Wales is not heard here. That is an ancient injustice that we can put right now. People have tried. Mabon in 1896 spoke in Welsh and quoted the illustrious Member for Rhondda, which is now represented by another illustrious person, my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers).

What is the present status? Even if the Standing Order is right, we are not allowed to quote in Welsh. A month ago during a debate on ferries I quoted from an account of a crossing of the channel that took place 50 years before the birth of Christ. Not unexpectedly, the account was in Latin and I quoted some 70 words, which was acceptable. My hon. Friends from Labour comprehensives understood what I was talking about, but I provided a translation for the Conservative victims of public school

education. It is extraordinary that speaking in Latin was permissible whereas I would have been stopped if I had uttered more than two or three words in Welsh.

My constituency used to be wholly bilingual. The children in the town of Caerleon spoke Latin, but the children outside the walls of the town spoke Welsh. Today one does not hear much Latin on the tongues of the children in Caerleon but, happily, one can still hear Welsh. That extraordinary language has echoed down the centuries and is still with us as a living treasure of enormous worth and it means so much to so many of us.

I did not have the advantage enjoyed by many hon. Members of speaking Welsh from the cradle, but as an adolescent I had the good luck to have a marvellous teacher who introduced me to Gweledigaethau'r Bardd Cwrsg, y Gododdin, Dafydd ap Gwilym and to the wonderful, majestic works of T. Gwyn Jones and the lyrical beauty of the imagery of Robert Williams Parry. No one has written with more accuracy, feeling and inspiration about working-class suffering in Wales in the north and south and about the quarry workers and miners than the Gwenally in the south or those who wrote about the quarry workers in north Wales.

It is difficult to express to those who live in one language the experience of living in more than one. It is difficult to explain that the first language that one hears at one's mother's breast, the last one that is expressed in the final prayers before death and the only language with the tenderness to make love in or in which one can curse effectively is that mother tongue, the one—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure whether it would be necessary in the Welsh Grand Committee to curse in Welsh or in any other language. The hon. Gentleman must relate his remarks more closely to the subject under consideration.

Mr. Flynn: We express strong words in the House. One of the disadvantages of a lack of simultaneous translation is that when curses in Welsh are made in the House—and I have heard them—there is no way that Front-Bench Members understand what is being said.

Mr. Michael: Or the Chair. One hopes they are not directed at the Chair.

Mr. Flynn: No, they are not.

Our request is modest. Is it unusual for the world's Parliaments to have more than one language? A review undertaken by the Inter-Parliamentary Union discovered that 51 Parliaments use only one language, 22 use two languages on a daily basis, six use three languages and four Parliaments, including Singapore, which is well known to hon. Members, use more than three languages. There is nothing novel about that. Simultaneous translation is provided easily, in a sophisticated manner. There is no reason why members of the Government Front-Bench team who do not speak Welsh should feel nervous about any lack of understanding in Committee. The people who provide the translations are extremely skilful.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Did the hon. Gentleman see the Secretary of State for Wales on television at the weekend in the Council of Ministers, where translation equipment was provided for him?

Mr. Flynn: Indeed I did. The European Community copes with half a dozen languages with great ease.

Amendment (y), which I am grateful has been selected, proposes a very modest concession. The main reason that we want to press it is that we know the extent of the difficulties when Welsh is spoken in the House. People from all corners of the world can sit in one part of the House where their companions can provide them with simultaneous translation. People have given evidence to Select Committees in a dozen languages.

There is a great danger that we shall continue the traditional disregard of the Welsh language and other minority languages that has occurred for about 200 years. Such disregard is part of the linguistic colonisation that has taken place in Britain and in many other countries.

Many of us are familiar with the sign in a Brittany classroom that said, "Défense de cracher, défense de parler Bretonne"—meaning do not spit, do not speak Breton. The little Bretons had sabots around their necks—exactly the same as the Welsh knot. One child who found another speaking Breton would pass the sabot. The petits délateurs were therefore turned against one another and into sneaks on the language in a positive movement to destroy the language.

In my constituency, as chronicled in "Brad y Llytrau Gleision", inspectors visited two schools in the middle of the last century and said that the children were all stupid because they could not understand a word that was spoken. The inspectors were unilingual in English and could not understand a word of the Welsh spoken by the children. They did not understand why Welsh was being spoken. As hon. Members have said, the children are part of a great educational tradition.

The language has survived. Waldo chronicled how by chance—it was miraculous—the language survived through the centuries because of the non-conformist Church, or because of the Catholic Church, as happened in Brittany. It survived not because people thought of it as a material reward but because they loved it, it was part of their lives and it was of genuine worth. They rejoiced in the literature of the language.

Mr. Rogers: In paying tribute to the various agencies that have kept the language alive, my hon. Friend ought to pay a great tribute to people such as the late Lord Heycock and other Labour Members who in the valleys of south Wales adopted Welsh language policies, started the system of Welsh comprehensive and primary schools and saved the Welsh language.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Jonathan Evans) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Rogers: The Minister who is shaking his head ought to be ashamed of his attitude to the Welsh language.

Mr. Flynn: I was building up to the climax of mentioning the great success of Welsh-medium education, especially in south Wales. For many of us who have worked in local authorities, it has been one of the great joys to give children who did not speak Welsh in their homes the chance to learn the language. Indeed, they had the chance to learn the language as their parents' generation never did—to read and write it. Many people of the previous generation were not literate. It is one of the great successes of Welsh education that the children

[Mr. Flynn]

have inherited the immense treasure of a second language—their own language. A second language is often the stepping stone to a third and fourth language.

I am disappointed that the Government will not see fit to accept the amendment, which, as I have said, is very modest. All it would do is enable translation equipment and translators to be made available in the Welsh Grand Committee, regardless of its venue. Translators are skilled and would be able to provide a service.

The difficulty is over what will happen with the *Hansard* writers. What will happen is what happens now when speeches of certain Members, whom I would not dare mention, are totally incomprehensible—to me, anyway. Some of them are from the far corners of these islands and speak in strange accents that I find very difficult to understand. By some odd process, we find that their speech is in *Hansard* in clear English. If the speech is not entirely understood, corrections can be made. I understand that in the case mentioned by the hon. Member for Caernarfon, Select Committee reporters take down what the translators say. If the person who has spoken in Welsh wishes to correct that later, that can be done. There is no difficulty whatsoever.

I accept that there are difficulties in other areas, for example, if we are to have a report in Welsh and English. However, there is nothing in amendment (y) to prevent it from being accepted tonight without any difficulty. The Government have given us a problem with how to proceed tonight. I want to consider whether to proceed with the amendment. We accept that a concession has been made.

I take on board the comment by hon. Members that this is not a new issue. An early-day motion, signed by 66 hon. Members, was tabled as long ago as 1988. Something could have come from that. It is late in the life of this Parliament. I know that an hon. Member spoke to this Parliament in Chaucerian English. For almost every hon. Member it was complete gibberish—yet it was declared to be in order. I will not test your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker, by repeating what was said, but it was English. The Standing Order allows for hon. Members to speak in Chaucerian English, regardless of the fact that hardly anyone can understand what is being said. But the language of Wales is not allowed here. Fourteen members of the Welsh Grand Committee are fluent in the Welsh language; several others can understand a speech in Welsh. More than a third of the members of that Committee can speak fluent Welsh and more than half can understand a speech in Welsh.

The final words of our national anthem, which we sing with great passion, are:

"O bydded i'r heniaith barhau"—

which means, "Oh would that the ancient language continues to live." "What we are asking tonight for Am yr uwch-bwyllgor Gymreig—the Welsh Grand Committee—is, O bydded i'r heniaith ddechreu."

9.6 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): We should paraphrase the child's question on seeing a politician in full flow—"Mummy, what is he for?" The same question needs to be asked of the Secretary of State for Wales when he attends the Welsh Grand Committee. Indeed, it is the question that we need to ask about the Committee itself. What is the Welsh Grand Committee for? What is the Secretary of State present at the Committee for?

A few weeks ago, the Secretary of State gave the impression of wanting to be reasonable in this debate. As I chair the Welsh group of Labour Members of Parliament this year, I want to stress the generosity and reasonableness with which we responded to the suggestions of change. The tone of our meetings; the tone adopted by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and his Front-Bench colleagues; and, above all, the tone that all Welsh Members brought to the Welsh parliamentary party when we discussed the issue with the Secretary of State, demonstrated the good will towards having a sensible debate about changes. It was said earlier that the Secretary of State went from that meeting promising to listen, but reneged on that within an hour, if not within minutes. That is a disgraceful response to the generosity of spirit shown by Welsh Members.

Why is not the right hon. Gentleman accepting a single one of the sensible amendments for change that have been put before the House tonight? They are not large and unreasonable changes; they are attempts to take forward the suggestions for change in a reasonable way. Surely it is unreasonable of the Secretary of State suddenly to become adamant that he will not accept anything other than the motion that he has put before the House.

I want to refer to two of the amendments. The first is that tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), which I welcome. My hon. Friend suggests that we should examine the departmental report of the Welsh Office, thereby suggesting a degree of accountability. The Secretary of State for Wales should be willing to answer questions and to respond on the detail in the report before the Welsh Grand Committee. Surely that is what we are in Parliament for. We are here to legislate and to hold the Executive accountable. I should have thought that the Secretary of State would welcome the opportunity to account to Welsh Members for his report and that he would accept the amendment.

The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) suggested that the Labour party might lose its dominance in Wales and might, therefore, regret having suggested that powers should be given to the people of Wales through an elected assembly in Wales. It may have escaped his notice that the fact that the electors can elect whom they choose is known as democracy, and that the process can swing against a party as well as for it. The Labour party has no fear of democracy. If we lost our dominance, others would represent the people of Wales, and rightly so. I have no fear, however, of that coming about for many years, unless the Conservative party totally changes its attitude of intransigence to what the electorate in Wales wants. The right hon. Gentleman's comment demonstrated the Conservatives' lack of interest in accountability, and a wish to hang on desperately to power informed his criticisms.

It is right that we should pursue the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney that there should be a small degree of accountability, and it is also right that the Grand Committee should study the reports by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. The reports are often lost, although they raise important issues that interest our

constituents. When we tell them that there is no proper debate in the House on many of the Select Committee's reports, they are surprised. When a Select Committee has gone into an issue in depth and produced a report, the Government have to make a response. Is it not sensible that there should be a proper and reasonable debate on the issues, and that the Welsh Grand Committee should be the place for those debates?

Amendment (y), tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), would allow the use of the Welsh language when the Grand Committee meets in Wales. Developments in recent years have allowed people the opportunity to use the Welsh language when they choose to do so. Those developments have been sensible. Increasingly, it has been a matter not of ramming the Welsh language down people's throats but of encouraging them to use it. I agree with the comments made by my hon. Friends the Members for Newport, West and for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) about the way in which Labour local authorities have encouraged the teaching of Welsh, and encouraged people to exercise choice rather than dominating them.

I was brought up in a Welsh-speaking family in north Wales, but I lost the Welsh language during my years in school. I welcome, therefore, the chance of relearning Welsh through adult education, as a second opportunity, and I also welcome the fact that, whereas I am semi-literate in the Welsh language, my children have had the opportunity of bilingual education and are able to speak Welsh. As adults, they have exercised their choice about what they do with that education and what they do with the ability to use two languages.

Is it right that the House took the decision for public bodies in Wales through the Welsh Language Act 1993, but that it is unwilling to apply that decision to our own proceedings when we meet in Wales? Surely it is minimal progress for us to legislate for public bodies and to place requirements on them, yet not to observe those requirements ourselves when we meet in Wales. The Welsh Language Act is concerned primarily with the activities of public bodies in Wales. We should surely apply those requirements to ourselves when we operate as a Welsh Grand Committee in Wales. That is a modest proposal.

As I mentioned earlier in an intervention, there are translation facilities in council chambers in Wales. At a recent meeting, British and German Members of Parliament were able to communicate because translation facilities were available. Translation is provided in a variety of public and private bodies, so why not have it in the Welsh Grand Committee? The Leader of the House said that the matter would be referred to the Procedure Committee. I simply reinforce the request for translation that was made earlier. Please let us have a speedy answer. Let the Government not drag their feet in the same way that they did for the Welsh Language Act, when there was unanimity of purpose in Wales and in the House.

This is an opportunity to turn a pointless talking shop into a place for reasoned debate, where we can hold the Secretary of State to account and have real debates on issues that affect our constituents. In the House, under a Conservative Government, the Secretary of State always has the votes to ignore hon. Members who represent Welsh constituencies. That is a fact of life, but he will gain greater credit and enhance his reputation if he changes the attitude that he has shown since the Welsh parliamentary party met and listen to what is being said by hon. Members who represent Welsh constituencies.

The saying to which the Secretary of State should pay attention is, "Bu ben byd bont," which means, "He who would be a leader must be a bridge." Let the Secretary of State listen to that and change his attitude, and help us to turn the Welsh Grand Committee into a place of meaningful debate, which will win respect from our constituents and the people of Wales as a whole.

9.15 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few remarks about the proposed changes to the Welsh Grand Committee.

During my time in the House, I have felt that the Welsh Grand Committee is an underused creature. It meets irregularly, but potentially it is an excellent forum, and as it is made up of all the Members of Parliament who represent Wales, it should naturally deal with business that affects only Wales. Opposition Members felt deeply disappointed that the Welsh Language Bill was referred to Standing Committee, not the Welsh Grand Committee. As the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) pointed out, many of the amendments that we tabled, which had all-party support among the Opposition parties and were popular in Wales, were voted down by English Conservative Members.

I very much wanted to be on the Committee that considered the Local Government (Wales) Bill, as did other hon. Members who represent Welsh constituencies. I naturally defer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) because of their experience and constituency interest, but I felt it highly improper that I could not speak for the new Carmarthenshire and for its powers and so on, when many English Conservative Members, who had no constituency interests, were voting down amendments tabled by the Labour party and the Opposition parties in Wales.

I broadly welcome the changes that the Government propose. The extra Question Time would be lively, although 30 minutes would not be enough, as many Back Benchers—especially Labour Back Benchers, as there are so many of us—already find it difficult to participate in the 35 or 40 minutes of Welsh questions. The time allowed for short debates—five minutes for the proposer, five minutes for the Minister and three minutes for other Members—is very short. I have some reservations about ministerial statements, especially if it is the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer making an opportunist guest appearance. Such details need to be changed, but broadly the measures are good.

I support the amendments spoken to by my hon. Friends the Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). Indeed, I echo the comment made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) on the use of the Welsh language. It is no big deal. It should be straightforward. Simultaneous translation is widespread now, certainly in Welsh-speaking Wales and across most of Wales. It is easily practicable. In view of the precedent of the Select Committee, I cannot see why the Leader of the House and the Secretary of State are making such a mountain of what should be a straightforward procedure and why they do not treat the Welsh language on an equal basis.

[Mr. Alan W. Williams]

Another feature that is missing from the Standing Orders is the frequency with which the reformed Welsh Grand Committee will meet. At the infamous meeting of 20 February, the Secretary of State said that it would meet about eight times a year. We want at least that. The Labour party suggested that it should meet every other Tuesday morning—a regular spot, which we would all know to expect. That would be 15 or 18 meetings a year.

What will the people of Wales make of the changes, if the House votes for them this evening? The changes will give us a body with no powers that meets eight times a year for two and a half hours. That will amount to 20 hours a year. The people of Wales want something that meets at least 20 hours a week, with real powers to debate and exercise powers that are now the powers of the Secretary of State. That can come only when we have an elected Welsh Assembly.

The proposals are a tiny 1 per cent. of what we want. They are a small improvement. I welcome them for those reasons.

9.20 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): We have had an illuminating debate, even including the comments made by the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), and his particular concern to save the Labour party as the party of government in Wales. I can see which way he is veering on his retirement.

The presentation of the new Standing Orders and our amendments represent a missed opportunity for the Government to take a significant step forward in the conduct of Welsh affairs within the House of Commons. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) spotlighted clearly in his speech the fact that we have here a fig leaf presented by the Government, in an effort to show that they are interested in extending in some way our opportunities to debate Welsh affairs. I suppose that we can go that far, because the changes in the Standing Orders will provide additional opportunities to debate Welsh affairs and to ask more questions about Welsh affairs, but they will do nothing more substantial. They will not allow Members of Parliament who represent Welsh constituencies to play a more practical and effective role in determining what happens in Wales.

The proposal made in a well-researched speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, our respected Friend with much experience, took one aspect of the business of the House dealt with by European Standing Committees, which could easily be used on the Welsh scene within the Welsh Grand Committee, to improve the ability of Welsh Members to question Ministers on their plans for any particular year in which they happened to be with us. They will not be there for much longer now, thank goodness. In view of what my hon. Friend said, some Opposition Members—no one knows who they may be—will be quaking at the thought of being on the Government's side of the Dispatch Box under the procedure that he has proposed and subject to questioning by him. Given that the procedure is already in use in the House, I hope that the Government will be prepared to support my hon. Friend's two amendments. We believe that they are worthy of support.

I was pleased that the Leader of the House was prepared to make a concession and consider the use of the Welsh language in meetings of the Grand Committee in Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), although I missed the early part of his speech, seemed to be making an effective case about why it should be natural for Welsh to be used in debates in the Grand Committee when it meets in Wales. My hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) argued convincingly that there should be no technical or other problems with that.

I would go so far as to say that section 3(2)(b) of the Welsh Language Act 1993 gives the Government a duty to ensure that Welsh can be used in the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales. It is fair to say that the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee are public business and that section 3 states that one of the functions of the Welsh Language Board is to

"advise persons exercising functions of a public nature on the ways in which effect may be given to the principle that, in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales, the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality".

When the matter is referred to the Procedure Committee, the Government will have the opportunity to recommend, as the Leader of the House said, that it should consider positively the way in which the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West can best be put into effect. While I accept that that cannot be hurried through in time for a meeting in a month's time, the Committee should be asked to consider the proposal with a view to bringing a report to the House that can be considered before the summer recess. On second thoughts, that may put the Committee under pressure because of rumours, which I hope that we can set aside, that we are due to finish at the end of May because of the Government's fears of not being able to continue for much longer.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): The hon. Gentleman should not bank on it.

Mr. Griffiths: I am still planning my holidays for August. The report should be made before the summer recess.

Given the angst that the run-up to the debate has caused, it is worth repeating that it was back in March 1993 that we first suggested that it would be worth reconsidering the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee to make it more effective. Since then, we have made several attempts to get a constructive dialogue going. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the meeting of the Welsh parliamentary Labour party—

Mr. Ron Davies: The Welsh parliamentary party.

Mr. Griffiths: I am sorry. I was unable to attend the Welsh parliamentary party meeting because of my duties elsewhere—I was at the Standing Committee on the iniquitous Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill. It is most unfortunate that, within an hour of the meeting, the Secretary of State virtually rubbished

all the proposals discussed there. When he replies to the debate, I hope that he will at least retrieve some of that ground, first, by reiterating the commitment that a report on the use of the Welsh language will be put before the House in plenty of time for us to consider it before the summer recess and, secondly, by accepting all the amendments that Opposition Members have tabled.

The first amendment is fairly technical and ought to cause no problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) outlined the argument for amendment (ff) on the quorum at the beginning of the debate. It simply falls into line with the practice in the Scottish Grand Committee and would certainly make sense, given the references already made to the fact that there are some parallels on certain basic points between the two Committees.

I hope that the Government will also accept amendment (a). Three members of the Committee with constituencies outside Wales ought to be a sufficient number when conducting the business of the Welsh Grand Committee. I hope that the Government are prepared to accept that—unless, of course, they think that a Conservative Government could come to power without any Conservative Members of Parliament representing Welsh constituencies. Otherwise, three members plus, from time to time, the one, two or three Conservative members of the Committee who might represent Welsh constituencies should be sufficient for them.

My hon. Friend also referred to amendment (p) and the need to ensure that the Welsh Grand Committee recommends that a Bill be read a Second time. A Bill should proceed only if it gains the assent of the Grand Committee. That would be a small but important step forward. It would establish a really democratic view of the Government's business in Wales.

Hon. Members cited a number of examples of how that might have helped the Government to avoid some disastrous mistakes, such as the poll tax, for which we have a permanent 2.5 per cent. increase on value added tax. The Government could have avoided that if they had tested the proposal in a Welsh Grand Committee that had the right to determine whether such a Bill should proceed.

A number of references have been made to the legislation to reform Welsh local government, the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen said, he dearly wished to be on the Standing Committee that considered that Bill; he had direct interests that he wanted to air in detail on behalf of his constituents. As a result of the way in which the Committee was structured, the present procedures of the House and the fact that the Government decided not to use Standing Order No. 86, which would have enabled them to hold the entire debate in an all-Welsh Committee, he missed that opportunity—much to the detriment of the way in which that Bill proceeded through the House.

I should have loved the opportunity to take part in the debates on the Bill—as would many other Welsh Members—but there were not enough places on the Committee for Labour Members. It is no good the Under-Secretary of State shaking his head—he does not have local government responsibilities—and trying to claim that that is rubbish. Given the membership and size of the Committee, there was no opportunity for Labour Members to be properly represented on it.

Mr. Richards: Referring to the Local Government (Wales) Bill, the hon. Gentleman said that the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) wished to be a member of the Standing Committee. During the debate on that issue, I pointed out that that hon. Member, and many other Opposition Members, had shown no interest in local government in Wales, because they had not tabled written questions, asked oral questions or taken part in any debates on local government reform in Wales. Given that the hon. Member for Carmarthen had shown no interest in local government, why should he have been on the Standing Committee?

Mr. Griffiths: That is a facetious remark—and I shall treat it as such. There was obviously no intent to take the argument forward.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: As I am being discussed, may I point out that at that time my constituency had a strong interest in that matter, which involved Carmarthenshire county council? My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) represented Dyfed on the Committee; there was a strong territorial interest in being on it. That is quite different from what the Minister said. As the Bill affected my constituency, I wanted to be a member of the Committee that examined the Bill.

Mr. Griffiths: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that point and there is no reason for us to dwell on it.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Might we dwell on that point just a little longer? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that Committee illustrated the frustration of Welsh legislation in the House? The Committee, with the support of hon. Members on both sides, defeated the Government on the issue of small counties in rural mid-Wales. The Government then chose to defeat the Committee on Report. However, the Government then decided to do exactly what the Committee had voted for in relation to Welsh local government, for English local government. What sort of a Government is that?

Mr. Griffiths: That was one of the ironies of the Local Government (Wales) Bill—Conservative members of the Committee were lobby fodder for the Government in terms of voting for a unitary system of government in Wales, but back home they fought tooth and nail to stop the local government boundary commission introducing unitary government in their constituencies. The reasoned amendment to the Second Reading of the Bill was the first occasion on which all the Opposition parties in Wales were united in the presentation of an argument against the Government's proposals.

The Welsh Grand Committee ought to be given the opportunity to have a positive say on Bills that affect only Wales. Of course, the Bills would then be considered in Committee, according to the normal procedures of the House. At least there would have been genuine approval of the principles of the measure by the Welsh Grand Committee.

When the Secretary of State winds up the debate, I hope that he will accept all our amendments and perhaps elaborate on how he hopes to put into effect the procedure for ensuring that the Welsh language amendment can be considered in detail by the House before the summer recess.

9.38 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): This interesting and varied debate has contained some constructive suggestions and a little synthetic indignation from time to time. I shall respond to the points that have been made. It is worth remembering that the objective that we are seeking to address with these motions is one on which there is a good deal of common ground across the Floor of the House—although one might not have thought so at times this evening.

It is common ground that the procedures of the Welsh Grand Committee need improving; no one suggested otherwise tonight. It is common ground that the Grand Committee, as it stands, has not always been felt to be the most useful forum for discussion. It is common ground that it has not always been useful for Back Benchers because of the time that is taken up by Front-Bench speeches in the Grand Committee as it stands. It is common ground that, as a result, the Committee is not widely reported and has a ritual element. We should be clear in our minds about that at the outset.

Undoubtedly, the proposals that the Leader of the House and I have brought before the House will make the Grand Committee more useful for Back Benchers and their constituents. They will increase the time that is available for Members to question Welsh Office Ministers. They will bring in the concept of short debates, which will have the merit that the Grand Committee can discuss different subjects and do so within time limits. They will bring the concept of Adjournment debates—a procedure used by the Scottish Grand Committee—into the Welsh Grand Committee. All those things will enhance the role of Back-Bench Members of Parliament.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: All that the Secretary of State has said in the past few minutes about the Welsh Grand Committee and its defects is true, and has been true for 17 years.

Why have the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of State for Scotland chosen this time to make similar proposals to change the way in which the Scottish Grand Committee and the Welsh Grand Committee discuss matters in Scotland and Wales respectively? Is it not the case that they have done so because they finally acknowledge that there is a case for devolution but are not prepared to answer it, so they are giving that answer to the people of Wales and the people of Scotland?

Mr. Hague: No. It is a completely separate argument from the constitutional arguments about devolution, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) rightly said.

We know that the things I have said are common ground because many of the suggestions for changes in the Standing Orders were made by the Opposition. I might equally well ask the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) why he and other Labour Members produced their proposals for changes to the Grand Committee in the middle of November. We can all play the game of asking why things happened at a certain time.

I made proposals to the House on 30 November which largely, if not entirely, incorporated the Opposition's proposals. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) described my proposals as a fig leaf. If he believes that our proposals have been a fig leaf, what does he think he was wearing when the Opposition proposed their changes in the proceedings of the Grand Committee a couple of weeks before my proposals?

That is the background to what has been described as an atmosphere of confrontation and no consultation—Opposition proposals that have been largely incorporated into the Government's proposals.

We have proposed further changes in the Standing Orders, which would go further than the proposals of Opposition Front Benchers. One such change is for the Committee to meet in different parts of Wales. That system seems to work well in Scotland; the Scottish Grand Committee has met in a variety of places. The Welsh Grand Committee has already met in Cardiff in the past. It was a mystery to me why the Opposition's proposals did not include that proposition.

Mr. Rogers *rose—*

Mr. Ron Davies *rose—*

Mr. Hague: I give way to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies).

Mr. Davies: The Secretary of State mentioned two points that are a matter of contention between us.

First, when we made submissions—initially in 1993, but several times since—we said that we wanted the Welsh Grand Committee to have substantial powers to make decisions, not only to engage in the ritualistic passing of question and answer between Opposition and Government.

Secondly, the Welsh Grand Committee was able to meet in Cardiff without a change in the Standing Orders, so it is inappropriate for the Secretary of State to claim that we need to change the Standing Orders to allow the Welsh Grand Committee to meet in Cardiff. It already can meet in Cardiff; it requires no change in the Standing Orders. That is why we did not propose any such changes.

Mr. Hague: It nevertheless remains the case that that is a proposal that we made which was not made by the hon. Gentleman. He has not expressed any opposition to it, however, so it is one of the things on which there appears to be agreement across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, but we must get this clear. It was the Opposition who insisted, in 1993, that the Welsh Grand Committee should meet in Cardiff.

Mr. Hague: Then it is all the more surprising that that insistence was not carried through to talking about other locations. I am pleased that there is agreement across the House on that issue.

The second respect in which we took the proposals further is that we agreed that Ministers with United Kingdom-wide responsibilities—with responsibilities that cover Wales—should be able to attend the Welsh Grand Committee from time to time. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Social Security, and my right hon. and learned Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Home

Secretary, all have responsibilities that directly cover Wales and it is right that they should be able to attend the Committee.

Mr. Rogers: The Secretary of State talks about consultation. He must accept that when he came to the Welsh parliamentary party meeting that I chaired—we were thankful that he could come at such short notice—the Opposition thought that he had accepted some of the points made during the consultation process. We were amazed when he left the room and almost immediately reneged on some of the undertakings that he had made. If he talks about consultation and common ground, he must respect the statements that he made during those discussions.

Mr. Hague: Yes, and I shall come to that point in a moment and discuss some of the subjects that we debated at that meeting of the parliamentary party.

All the proposals are aimed at improving the Committee's workings. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) expressed scepticism about the changes. He thought that they were set in a different context and had a different motive behind them. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy said, this argument is different from a proposal to change the constitutional position. If a sinister motive to undermine the Labour party lay behind our proposals, why did the Labour party advance very similar proposals?

We do not need to change the Welsh Grand Committee and its proceedings in order to discredit the arguments for a Welsh Assembly; all that we have to do is to ask the hon. Member for Caerphilly to give another interview to "On the Record", where he treats repeated and authoritative reports of division in his party by saying that everything is clear. In one newspaper that I saw at the weekend, he was reported as saying that the Labour party's policy was clear and would become clearer. We do not need to change the Grand Committee in order to discredit such arguments.

Mr. Rowlands: In that case, will the Secretary of State confirm that, in any debate that we have on Welsh devolution in the next nine months or so, he will not submit the proposals as his alternative?

Mr. Hague: Certainly. This is not an alternative to devolution; it is an improvement in the workings of the United Kingdom Parliament in the context of a UK Parliament. The proposal creates a Committee which hon. Members will find more useful, to which people will want to listen and which will do a better job of scrutinising the work of the Executive. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney sees it in a particular context—if the measure were set in that context, I could understand his scepticism, but it is not. We have already incorporated many of the proposals made by Opposition Members, who have had many opportunities to add to them.

As my right hon. Friend the Lord President said, I wrote to the hon. Member for Caerphilly on 14 December and offered a meeting. The hon. Gentleman says that I did not, but I have the letter, which states:

"I would welcome your comments on them"—

the proposals—

"and would be ready to discuss the changes if you would find that helpful."

If that is not offering a meeting, I do not know what is. If the hon. Gentleman does not think that that is offering a meeting, his difficulty will not be if the Committee uses the Welsh language, but if it uses the English language for discussion.

I met the leaders of the Opposition parties to discuss the subject and clearly asked them what alternative proposals they had. To be fair, they all made it clear in their letters that they would have preferred the establishment of a Welsh Assembly, but that is not common ground across the Floor of the House. I asked them for specific amendments to the Standing Orders as proposed and there was much sucking of teeth and furrowing of brows. It was suggested that we should not lay down a time of 10.30 am for meetings in different parts of Wales, as that might prove logistically difficult, and that proposal was changed in the Standing Orders. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said that nothing had been changed as a result of his suggestions, but that change has been made.

I was asked to discuss all those matters in the Welsh Grand Committee. That seems to have been the main bone of contention this evening. I have never deviated from my view that it is the House that has power to change Standing Orders, that the matter is of interest to hon. Members in general—not just Welsh Members—and that it should be debated on the Floor of the House. I recall expressing that view at the meeting of the Welsh parliamentary party, as well as in a television interview afterwards.

Mr. Ron Davies: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Wigley: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hague: I am spoilt for choice. I must give way to the hon. Member for Caerphilly, but I will give way to the hon. Member for Caernarfon later.

Mr. Davies: I hope that the Secretary of State is giving way to me out of choice rather than necessity, but I am grateful to him in any event.

If the Secretary of State believes now, and has always believed, that it is inappropriate for the Welsh Grand Committee to discuss such changes, why did the Government suggest—via the usual channels—that, rather than debating the subject on the Floor of the House, we should do so in the Committee?

Mr. Hague: I have made no such suggestion. I have consistently said that these matters should be discussed and resolved on the Floor of the House—and here we are, resolving them on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Wigley: The Secretary of State will recall that a number of constructive proposals were advanced.

[Mr. Wigley]

I acknowledge that one, relating to the variation of the starting time in rural Wales, has been taken on board; but why did not the right hon. Gentleman take on board the suggestion relating to European Standing Committee procedure, which I believe commands considerable support in the House?

Mr. Hague: I was coming to that and, if I do not take too many more interventions, I shall be able to explain more about the Government's position.

In the meeting to which I have referred, we engaged in a constructive discussion of a number of matters. The hon. Member for Caerphilly asked for reassurances about the timing and content of debates in the Welsh Grand Committee being determined by the usual channels, rather than solely dictated by the Government, and I gave him those reassurances. The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) and others made their point about the possible value of the Committee's discussing Select Committee reports; I agreed, and I am perfectly amenable to the idea of Conservative-led discussions over the coming months.

In the meeting, I specifically said that I was amenable to the proposal of the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney with regard to European Standing Committee procedure, and said that I was amenable. Let me make it clear that the procedure can be adopted under the proposed Standing Orders: a debate in the Grand Committee on a matter referred to it by the House could be a debate of the type cited by the hon. Gentleman, and could be dealt with in the same style as a European Standing Committee debate. I am entirely sympathetic to the idea of using one of the Grand Committee's meetings for that purpose in the coming months—but, according to all the advice that I have received, we do not need to change the proposed Standing Orders to achieve that.

During the meeting, the hon. Member for Caernarfon and I discussed the number of meetings that should take place. I think that he was relatively reassured by what I said. Some hon. Members mentioned the use of the Welsh language; my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made an announcement about that earlier today. I do not think it fair to say that consultation has been ignored during the process that has taken place.

Mr. Rowlands: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Flynn: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hague: I must press on, because I want to comment on the amendments. If there is time, however, I will give way to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

We have heard some proposals this evening that were not made during our consultations, although there is nothing wrong with that. It has been proposed, for instance, that the Committee's quorum should be smaller. Given that the Committee became inquorate at various times during its most recent meeting, the proposition is not entirely unreasonable. The quorum of the Scottish Grand Committee is 10, as has been pointed out. That is a fair point, and the Government will accept the amendment.

Other amendments refer to the use of the Welsh language. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that the matter could be referred to the Procedure Committee. We recognise that powerful points have been made. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) did not need to watch me on television at the Council of Ministers, listening to a simultaneous translation; he could have seen me chairing a meeting this morning in the chamber of Montgomeryshire district council, half of which was conducted in Welsh. I readily appreciate the ease, speed and simplicity with which those arrangements can be introduced and how many of the places in which the Grand Committee could meet already have the relevant equipment. All those factors must be borne in mind by the Procedure Committee which, of course, must also bear in mind the important change of principle that would be involved for the House as a whole. We intend the Committee to examine all those questions. There are other things—

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Hague: I must deal with the remaining points.

We have had frank disagreements on other matters. There were proposals for an increased or enhanced legislative role for the Grand Committee. Of course, the hon. Member for Caernarfon spoke from a completely different viewpoint on these matters. He has a wholly different perception of how the United Kingdom should be governed. We understand that; he wants to take the United Kingdom apart, so we approach the subject quite differently. We are making our proposals on the basis of the government of the UK as a whole.

There have been elections in which the Labour party won in the UK as a whole entirely because of votes cast in Scotland and Wales. Everyone accepted that, and I have never noticed Labour saying that English Members should make separate legislative decisions because they won a majority only because of votes cast in Scotland. The UK continues to be governed on the original basis.

Amendment (p) would set up the role of the Welsh Grand Committee quite differently from that of the Scottish Grand Committee, the European Standing Committees, Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation and Second Reading Committees, so we cannot accept it.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney wanted to intervene, and I now have time to give way to him.

Mr. Rowlands: I had intended to press my amendment to a vote, so I want further clarification from the Secretary of State. The key to amendment (dd) is the second paragraph which sets out a specific procedure about the first hour of questions. That provision does not appear in the draft Standing Orders, which contain many prescriptive procedural provisions. I cannot see how the provision that I seek can be added or informally agreed unless it is part of the Standing Order itself.

Mr. Hague: My advice is that it is possible to adopt the procedure that the hon. Gentleman envisages under the proposed Standing Orders. A Minister can make a statement and be questioned on it. That will be followed by a debate. The difficulty with the amendment is that it

also contains other proposals, such as deciding matters on a substantive motion—perhaps that might be suggested in the amendment linked with amendment (dd).

I give an undertaking to the hon. Gentleman that if any difficulty arises in the coming months in following the procedure that he advocates, I shall certainly want to introduce a further change by way of clarification. I assure him that all my advice is in the direction that he seeks.

The changes are being proposed on the basis of government of the United Kingdom. That is the key to them, and it is the difference between our proposals and those of some Opposition Members. We have suggested a series of proposals to improve the workings of the Grand Committee. No one who has attended its meetings can fail to think anything other than that its proceedings should be improved. We have incorporated proposals made by the Opposition, but, in many respects, we have gone further, which is unfortunate for members of the Labour Front Bench who have struggled ever since to make this a party issue.

We have taken the proposals through a consultation process during which a number of additional ideas have been accepted. We have brought them for debate to the Floor of the House where we propose to accept further amendments which have only now been brought forward. That lengthy procedure, in which every Welsh Member has had the opportunity to participate, has been described at times as lacking in consultation or disgraceful. This full evening's debate on the Floor of the House has, oddly, been described by the hon. Member for Caerphilly as restrictive. This is the first time that a full evening's debate on the Floor of the House, as opposed to a debate in Committee, has been described as restrictive.

After examination, and given the range of reasons for improving the workings of the Grand Committee, we have now come to the right proposals. It is time to press ahead with them, so I commend them to the House and I hope that they will receive its support. Amendments that do not fit in with them, other than those that I have already shown flexibility over or that I have accepted, should be rejected by the House.

Amendment proposed: (a), in line 15, leave out 'five' and insert 'three'.—*[Mr. Ron. Davies.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 50, Noes 164.

Division No. 71] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Callaghan, Jim
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corston, Jean
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hood, Jimmy
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Morgan, Rhodri
Pike, Peter L
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Hain and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Trend, Michael
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Simon Burns.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions relating to Welsh Business which she was then required to put, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Amendment made: (ff), in line 18, at end insert—

'(1A) The quorum of the committee shall be seven, subject to paragraph (5) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings))'.—[*Mr. Ron Davies.*]

Amendment proposed: (p), in line 116, after 'committee', insert—

'the committee having recommended that the bill be read a second time'.—[*Mr. Ron Davies.*]

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 50, Noes 157.

Division No. 72] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea East)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D N
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hood, Jimmy
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Morgan, Rhodri
Pike, Peter L
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Forman, Nigel
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Trend, Michael
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Burns and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question, as amended, put:—

The House divided: Ayes 154, Noes 50.

Division No. 73] **[10.25 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Forman, Nigel
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Richards, Rod
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Trend, Michael
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Gyles Brandreth.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Bennett, Andrew F
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D N
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Eastham, Ken
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Morgan, Rhodri
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Hain and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 98 (Welsh Grand Committee) shall be repealed and Standing Orders A to G below shall have effect;

(2) Standing Order No. 87 (Attendance of law officers and ministers in standing committees) shall be amended, in line 9, after "business))", by inserting "or a motion in the Welsh Grand Committee under Standing Order (Welsh Grand Committee (composition and business))";

(3) Standing Order No. 89 (Procedure in standing committees) shall be amended, in line 3, after "business))", by inserting "Standing Order (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings))"; and

(4) other Standing Orders shall have effect subject to the foregoing provisions of this Order.

A. Welsh Grand Committee (composition and business)

(1) There shall be a standing committee called the Welsh Grand Committee, which shall consist of all Members representing Welsh constituencies, together with not more than five other Members nominated by the Committee of Selection, which shall have power from time to time to discharge the Members so nominated by it and to appoint others in substitution for those discharged.

(2) The quorum of the committee shall be seven, subject to paragraph (5) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)).

(3) The business of the committee shall include—

(a) questions tabled in accordance with Standing Order B (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer));

(b) short debates held in accordance with Standing Order C (Welsh Grand Committee (short debates));

(c) ministerial statements proceeded with under Standing Order D (Welsh Grand Committee (ministerial statements));

(d) bills referred to it in accordance with Standing Order E (Welsh Grand Committee (bills));

(e) such specified matters relating exclusively to Wales as may be referred to it in accordance with Standing Order F (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)); and

(f) motions for the adjournment of the committee, made under paragraph (5) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)).

(4) Any Minister of the Crown, being a Member of the House, though not a member of the committee, may take part in the deliberations of the committee and may make a motion, but shall not vote or be counted in the quorum.

B. Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)

(1) Notices of questions for oral answer in the Welsh Grand Committee by Welsh Office ministers on a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)) may be given by members of the committee in the Table Office.

(2) Notices of questions given under this order shall bear an indication that they are for oral answer in the Welsh Grand Committee.

(3) No more than one notice of a question may be given under this order by any member of the committee for each day specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)) for the taking of questions.

(4) On any day so specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)), questions shall be taken at the commencement of the sitting; no such question shall be taken later than half an hour after the commencement of the proceedings thereon; and replies to questions not reached shall be printed with the Official Report of the committee's debates for that day.

(5) Notices of questions under this order may be given ten sitting days before that on which an answer is desired:

Provided that when it is proposed that the House shall adjourn for a period of fewer than four days, any day during that period (other than a Saturday or a Sunday) shall be counted as a sitting day for the purposes of the calculation made under this paragraph.

C. Welsh Grand Committee (short debates)

(1) Notices of subjects to be raised in short debates in the Welsh Grand Committee, on a day specified in an order made under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)), may be given by members of the committee in the Table Office.

(2) Subjects of which notice is given under paragraph (1) of this order must relate to Wales.

(3) Not more than one notice of a subject may be given under this order by any member of the committee for each day specified under paragraph (1) of Standing Order G (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)) for the holding of short debates.

(4) On any day so specified such debates shall be held at the commencement of the sitting or, if the order under paragraph (1) specifies also the taking of questions on that day, immediately after questions.

(5)(a) No Member except the Minister of the Crown replying to the debate shall be called to speak later than half an hour after the commencement of the first such debate.

(b) The Member who gave notice of the subject and the Minister of the Crown replying to the debate may each speak for five minutes. Other Members may speak for three minutes.

(c) The chairman may direct any Member who exceeds the limits in sub-paragraph (b) to resume his seat forthwith.

(6) Notice of subjects under this order may be given 10 sitting days before that on which they are sought to be raised:

Provided that when it is proposed that the House shall adjourn for a period of fewer than four days, any day during that period (other than a Saturday or a Sunday) shall be counted as a sitting day for the purposes of the calculation made under this paragraph.

D. Welsh Grand Committee (ministerial statements)

(1) The chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee may permit a Minister of the Crown, whether or not a Member of the House, to make a statement, of which prior notice has been given to him, on a matter relating to Wales, and to answer questions thereon put by members of the committee.

(2) Ministerial statements may be made—

(a) at the commencement of a sitting; or

(b) if questions are taken, immediately after the conclusion of proceedings thereon; or

(c) if short debates are held, immediately after the conclusion of those proceedings.

(3) Proceedings under this order shall be brought to a conclusion at the discretion of the chairman.

(4) A Minister of the Crown making a statement under paragraph (1) of this Order, who is not a Member of the House, may not do so from the body of the committee; and shall not vote, make any motion or be counted in the quorum.

E. Welsh Grand Committee (bills)

(1) A motion, of which at least ten days' notice has been given, may be made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business, that a public bill be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee, and the question thereupon shall be put forthwith; and if, on the question being put, not fewer than twenty Members rise in their places and signify their objection thereto, the Speaker shall declare that the noes have it:

Provided that no such notice shall be given until the bill has been printed and delivered to the Vote Office.

(2) The committee shall report to the House either that it recommends that the bill ought to be read a second time or that it recommends that the bill ought not to be read a second time, and in the latter case it shall have power to state its reasons for so recommending.

(3) Upon a motion being made for the second reading of a bill reported from the committee, the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

F. Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)

(1) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown at the commencement of public business to the effect that a specified matter or matters relating exclusively to Wales be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration, and the question thereon shall be put forthwith.

(2) If such a motion be agreed to, the committee shall consider the matter or matters referred to it and shall report only that it has considered the said matter or matters.

G. Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)

(1) A motion may be made by a Minister of the Crown providing (or varying previous provision) for the Welsh Grand Committee—

(a) to sit on specified days at a specified place in Wales, the sitting commencing, and proceedings being interrupted, at such hours as shall be specified;

(b) to sit on other specified days at Westminster at half-past ten o'clock, or at half-past ten o'clock and between four o'clock and six o'clock;

(c) to take questions under Standing Order B (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)) on certain of the days specified under paragraph (a) or paragraph (b) above; and

(d) to hold short debates under Standing Order C (Welsh Grand Committee (short debates)) on certain of the days so specified;

(e) to consider specified bills which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order E (Welsh Grand Committee (bills)) on certain of the days so specified; and

(f) to consider specified matters which shall have been referred to it under Standing Order F (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales) on certain of the days so specified;

and the Speaker shall put forthwith the question on such a motion, which may be decided at any hour, though opposed:

Provided that nothing in this order shall prevent the committee from considering further at a sitting at Westminster business adjourned at a previous sitting in Wales, nor from considering at a sitting in Wales business adjourned at a sitting at Westminster.

(2) The provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), so far as they relate to the naming of a day in respect of business by the Member appointed chairman and the committee's appointment of future days in respect of business not completed at a sitting, shall not apply to the Welsh Grand Committee.

(3) The chairman shall interrupt proceedings (other than on a motion made under paragraph (5) below) at the time specified in relation to the sitting by an order made under paragraph (1) above or, in the absence of such provision, at one o'clock, subject to paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees).

(4) At the moment of interruption, proceedings under consideration and not disposed of shall stand adjourned.

(5) After the interruption of proceedings, or on the completion of the business appointed for consideration at that sitting, whichever is the earlier, a motion for the adjournment of the committee may be made by a Minister of the Crown, and, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees) the chairman shall, not later than half an hour after the motion has been made, adjourn the committee without putting any question; and in respect of business taken under this paragraph, the quorum of the committee shall be three.

ESTIMATES [2ND ALLOTTED DAY, 1ST PART]

It being after Ten o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates) and the Order [this day], put forthwith the deferred Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings on Supplementary Estimates 1995-96.*

Class XIII, Vote 4

Question put,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £19,355,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1996 for expenditure by the Department of Social Security on administration, for agency payments, the promotion of Government policy on disability issues, and for certain other services including grants to local authorities and voluntary organisations.

The House divided: Ayes 121, Noes 10.

Division No. 74] **[10.30 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Faber, David
Forman, Nigel
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Trend, Michael
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Gyles Brandreth.

NOES

Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Llwyd, Elfyn
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maxton, John
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Banks and
Mr. Alan Simpson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £19,355,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1996 for expenditure by the Department of Social Security on administration, for agency payments, the promotion of Government policy on disability issues, and for certain other services including grants to local authorities and voluntary organisations.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Questions which she was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates &c.).*

ESTIMATES 1996-97 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1997 a number not exceeding 52,050 all ranks be maintained for Naval Service.

ESTIMATES 1996-97 (ARMY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1997 a number not exceeding 140,260 all ranks be maintained for Army Service, a number not exceeding 131,500 for the Individual Reserves, and a number not exceeding 59,000 for the Territorial Army.

ESTIMATES 1996-97 (AIR) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1997 a number not exceeding 70,100 all ranks be maintained for the Air Force Service, a number not exceeding 19,305 for the Royal Air Force Reserve, and a number not exceeding 2,310 for the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 1994-95

Resolved,

That a sum not exceeding £148,670,792.82 be granted to her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to make good excesses of certain grants for Civil Services for the year ended on 31st March 1995, as set out in House of Commons paper No. 196.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1995-96

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £3,426,734,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges for Defence and Civil Services for the year ending on 31st March 1996, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 197 and 260.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions relating to Supplementary Estimates 1995-96 and the Estimates, Excesses, 1994-95; And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory, Mrs. Angela Knight and Mr. Michael Jack do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (NO. 2) BILL

Mr. Michael Jack accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1995 and 1996; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 72.]

Pensioner War Veterans

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10.49 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I wish to take up the case of my constituent, Mr. Jack Conn, which is linked to the cases of many constituents of other hon. Members.

Mr. Conn served in the Royal Medical Corps from 1 November 1939 to May 1946 and rose to the rank of acting corporal. He saw service in the middle east from 1942, and spent most of the time there until he left the Army.

Mr. Conn had, by all accounts, a fairly uneventful war, although, being in the Royal Medical Corps, he dealt with many casualties of battles such as El Alamein and beyond. Interestingly, his wife Sheena was the operator who sent the signal that conveyed from General Eisenhower's headquarters in Rheims the historic words:

"unconditional surrender of all German land, sea and air forces in Europe . . . all active operations cease".

That is a small by the bye for my hon. Friend the Minister.

On 13 June 1994, Mr. Conn, worried that he would have no medals for the 50th anniversary of VE day because they had been stolen from his son's house, contacted the Ministry of Defence medal office, requesting that his 1939-45 star, defence medal, Africa star and war medal be replaced, as they had been stolen in a burglary. They were being stored at his son's house at the time. The property was not insured because he had not believed that he had enough money to insure the medals.

Mr. Conn received a standard response, advising him that his records would be checked and that he would have to pay a charge to have his medals replaced. He had already sent his AB64 book and he thought that that would cover the search. He received another letter from the Ministry of Defence on 11 October 1994, saying that his records had not been found and asking that he fill in a further questionnaire, although he had already sent his AB64 which he had thought would be enough. The Ministry of Defence still needed more information.

Mr. Conn contacted me on 5 April 1995, and I went to the MOD and contacted the medal office, enclosing a copy of Mr. Conn's AB64, which he had sent to the MOD the previous year without much success.

Eventually, on 11 May, I received a letter from my hon. Friend Lord Henley, then Under-Secretary of State for Defence, saying that Mr. Conn's service records were still unavailable, but that he expected that his application for replacement medals would be finalised by July. That was during the 50th anniversary year and obviously it was important that Mr. Conn had the medals in the year.

On 18 August, I had to write to my noble Friend Earl Howe, who had replaced Lord Henley, asking what had happened to the application as Mr. Conn had heard nothing further from the MOD. On 8 September, my noble Friend responded, confirming that the medals that Mr. Conn was entitled to receive were there and saying that it would cost him £56.95 plus postage to have them sent to him.

Mr. Conn contacted me again to say that, unfortunately, he was unable to afford that sum at that time and would therefore be unable to claim his medals. Like many people, he was under financial restraints as a pensioner and the charge would, he believed, add to his outgoings and he could not justify it.

It is interesting to note that when the local pensioner group of which Mr. Conn is a member took up his case, the secretary received a letter from the medal office saying:

"Free replacements would be an unfair burden on official finances and it would be impossible to manage such a procedure and effect control to avoid abuse."

It was that statement that annoyed, if not concerned, Mr. Conn, as he felt that he was being dismissed as a problem rather than being seen as part of a previous solution.

I was subsequently asked by my constituents to petition Parliament. There were 1,400 names on the petition, which I lodged behind the Chair. Many of those names came from outside the constituency and I received a flood a letters at the time from many people laying out similar cases and problems. The petition requested that the House urge the Ministry of Defence to consider the plight of Mr. Conn and others of like disposition, having been awarded medals in recognition of their service in the armed forces of Her Majesty the Queen or her predecessors, and having been deprived of them by unlawful means or by misadventure and now being unable to replace them, and to endeavour to replace those medals. In essence, that is what tonight's debate is about; it is about the spirit behind that petition.

There was a small press campaign in *The Sun* to gain support for the cause. I received some fascinating letters as a result of that campaign, and I should like to draw the attention of the House to just one of them. It was from Mrs. Marie Meikleham of Andersonstown, Belfast, who had just paid the same sum for her husband's RAF medals. That amount of money constituted her weekly income from her pension and she felt that, although she had paid it, she had had to make some serious savings elsewhere. Her letter stated:

"I recently paid £56.89 to the RAF to have my late husband's medals replaced . . . He died 19 years ago after suffering five heart attacks in six years. Professor Frank Partridge, who was also a prisoner of war in the Far East, and a very well known heart specialist, told us that my husband's heart problems were probably caused by a lack of B1 while a prisoner."

I do not intend to draw on that letter too much, but it strikes me that Mrs. Meikleham's husband had died and she wished to have some memento of her husband, whose medals had obviously disappeared. She found herself in an invidious position; despite the fact that her husband, like many others, had put his life on the line for this country, she found that she had to pay for the medals. She had to pay what seemed to me to be a reasonably small sum, but was, to her and many like her, a large sum.

Realising that the problem was so widespread, I presented an early-day motion. To date, about 122 hon. Members have signed it; I asked only about 50 to do so but, remarkably, over the following few weeks, more and more hon. Members went to the Table Office and added their names. That is unusual; I did not chase them, but clearly the cause struck a chord with many of my colleagues.

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

I later received a letter from Earl Howe in response to another letter that I sent to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the cost of the medals. Once again, the Ministry of Defence stayed with the line that the cost of replacing those medals must be borne by the recipient.

I should like to raise a few thoughts with my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. Are we going to go through this saga every time we come up to the 50th anniversary of important military actions in which our constituents and their parents have fought—such as those in Korea or Malaysia? If many of those dismissive letters are sent out, it augurs ill for the relationship between the Ministry of Defence and pensioner groups, many of whom include veterans.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State is perhaps unique in Government in that he is one of a dwindling number of people who have seen service in the armed forces. I hope that he understands the importance of medals to many people—I am pleased to see him on the Front Bench to respond to me tonight.

Many like Jack Conn were not boy's own heroes, but simply went out and served their country. But it is that very sense of service that is at stake tonight. It is the fact that when their country called on them, they were not found wanting. Many of their friends and colleagues, who will be remembered through the medals, are not here today, because they were not as lucky as Mr. Conn and his like. The medals are a doorway to the past—a way of opening up memories and handing them on to their children.

As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, I am the last person to ask for increased Government expenditure, and I am not making an exception here. Such a small amount could probably be saved from any number of administrative budgets in almost any Whitehall Department.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The £30 million of compensation to Spanish fishermen, for instance.

Mr. Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend places yet another amount on the table. I should be grateful if that were taken into consideration.

We set great store by entertaining overseas dignitaries and others. I wonder who comes first at the end of the day, when the budgets come up for grabs.

I make no apology for calling the debate, or for detaining the House longer than necessary. Although my hon. Friend the Minister is unlikely to accept my suggestion that the Government should find some way of paying for the medals, I urge him to accept the natural justice of the case, and to find some way in which Mr. Conn and others like him can receive their medals so that they need not, in exceptional circumstances, make the invidious choice of doing without medals which are important to them and which they may wish to pass on.

I hope that all Members of Parliament, from our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister downwards, will consider it fair and reasonable for my hon. Friend the Minister and other Ministers to understand the true nature of the sacrifice made by these men and women, and will make recompense by giving them what they deserve—their medals—as soon as possible.

11.1 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on securing this important debate, and on presenting his case in such a measured and moving manner. As a former Scots Guardsman, he is a worthy and eminently well-qualified champion of the cause of our service veterans—and this is not the first representation that he has made on their behalf. He has written to my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, laid a substantial petition before the House and tabled an early-day motion which has—as he said—commanded substantial and largely unsought support. I am sure that those who have given a great deal in the service of their country welcome his support, and the robust, clear and sensible way in which he presented his case.

Campaign medals have been awarded to officers since the Armada, and to other ranks since the battle of Waterloo. Gallantry awards have a similar history: the Crimean war saw the introduction of the distinguished conduct medal for other ranks. All medals are a tangible reminder of gallant exploits, and are naturally a source of considerable pride both to those to whom they are awarded and to their families. After all, they represent public recognition of dedicated and honourable service to the Crown, sometimes in the most dangerous and difficult circumstances. Any of us who saw it need only recall the unbelievable, very moving and memorable sight of the massed ranks of veterans marching on the VE and VJ day parades last year to realise the wholesome pride and inestimable value that veterans rightly attach to their medals.

Before I deal with the points made by my hon. Friend, let me point out that—as he said—he sees the issue in a broader context than that of Mr. Conn. I trust that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I set out a little of the background. He outlined the details of one case, but I know that he will not wish me to limit the scope of my response. I hope that what I say will clarify the position of Mr. Conn, whose interests he has represented so tenaciously.

Our policy on the issue of medals is clear, and has been followed by all Governments. First-issue medals are issued free of charge to recipients; replacements are issued in certain circumstances on a pre-payment basis. All who have qualified for medals receive their awards free of charge. If they are still serving—as is the case with many medals awarded for service in the Falklands, with the coalition forces in the Gulf, in Northern Ireland or, most recently, with the United Nations protection force and the implementation force in Bosnia—service men are given their medals to wear with their uniform by their commanding officers.

In the case of service rendered during the two world wars, campaign medals were issued after the majority of service men were demobbed. After the first world war, medals were issued to individuals or their next of kin automatically. The situation after the second world war was slightly different, as ex-service men were invited to apply for their medals. Many did and received them at the

time. Others did not, and it was not until the celebrations last year stimulated, for obvious reasons, wonderful, happy old memories—and not such happy old memories—that many finally came forward. Although, I regret to say, because of that there have been inevitable delays in issuing medals—delays caused by the sudden, immense demand—all those who have made their first application are entitled to free issue of their awards.

Indeed, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staff of the medal offices in Droitwich, Innsworth and Gosport, who have dealt with a huge number of applications in a very short time. Their work has brought great pleasure to many veterans and their families.

I should stress that, once issued, medals are, in common with any other personal belongings, the responsibility of the recipient. We expect those who are entrusted with their safety, whether veterans or their families, to take reasonable care of them and ensure that they are safe from casual loss. Most people have their medals insured as part of their house contents policy and do not leave them lying about or loan them to others without first considering their safety.

If an individual chooses not to take such care, or not to take out such a policy, it is entirely his own decision. To do so is not mandatory; nor, of course, am I suggesting that it should be, but there are always those who trust to luck that they will not suffer the unspeakable and unfortunate invasion of privacy or unforeseen disaster that might result in the theft of their valuables and do not make adequate provision for that possibility. My hon. Friend and I would not disagree about that, and such an event is, of course, a tragedy. I have every sympathy for those who suffer what is undeniably a trauma, but we cannot escape the fact that it was entirely due to their free choice.

I entirely understand and accept that medals will be lost in wholly unforeseen circumstances. Unfortunately, it is a fact of life that, despite the very best efforts of those looking after them, some medals will be mislaid through theft, fire, flood or other natural disaster. In such cases, my Department does all that it can to provide replacements where entitlement has been confirmed from surviving service records and where proof of loss has been provided by the claimant. We ask for copies of police reports or insurance claims to prove genuine loss.

Regrettably, when records are not to hand, the process of reassessment of entitlement can take many months to complete. To ensure that all are treated fairly, claims are dealt with in the strict order that they are received. Nevertheless, we are happy to provide replacements in such cases.

My hon. Friend will be aware that this policy extends, where medal stocks allow, even to veterans who served as long ago as the first world war. That alone is an extraordinarily remarkable feat—let us not forget that this is for service rendered some 80 years ago. In addition, if the circumstances are as I have outlined, my Department may supply replacement medals to first-generation next of kin.

I come now to the point of my hon. Friend's complaint. My Department does charge for the costs of replacing lost or stolen medals. Although we freely and willingly issue medals in the first place for nothing, we do not consider it appropriate for the taxpayer to foot the bill for replacements, although I accept what my hon. Friend said about the sum of money involved.

Replacements for medals lost in circumstances beyond the owner's control are therefore supplied only on pre-payment of the appropriate charge. I understand that this position is shared by the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, which has confirmed that it is its practice to issue replacement insignia or medals only on pre-payment.

I fully understand and acknowledge the splendid efforts made by my hon. Friend on behalf of his constituent, Mr. Conn. I understand that Mr. Conn lost his medals, the 1939-45 star, the Africa star, the defence medal and war medal—all of which are very honourable and form an impressive line-up by anyone's stretch of service—during a burglary at his son's home. The House and I have every sympathy for him. He is, as he knows, entitled to have his medals replaced on pre-payment of £56.95, the cost of the medals and postage. Unfortunately, we cannot make an exception in his case, since to treat an individual specially would be to treat many others unfairly.

I hasten to add that our policy of charging for the replacement of lost medals is not a new one dreamt up by a wicked, parsimonious Government. As early as 1899, paragraph 2042 of Queen's Regulations stated that

"replacement at public expense will not be recommended unless the loss is proved to come under (a)",

that is,

"when the soldier was on duty and from causes entirely beyond his control".

We expect that the costs of providing replacement medals, whether to the recipient, serving or non-serving, or to relatives should not be borne by the defence budget. To do so would be a foolish waste of money.

I make it abundantly clear that, as my hon. Friend will understand, the Ministry of Defence is not in the business of selling campaign medals for profit. We leave that business to independent medal dealers. The charge for replacing medals represents the unit cost of doing so and is carefully costed from different elements.

Medals are manufactured for us by the Royal Mint, which invoices my Department for its services and for its material costs, including any bullion charges involved. Most campaign medals are, of course, made from base metals, but others have a precious metal content. On top of that, my Department makes a small administrative charge, which is intended to cover purely the staff cost of checking medal entitlement from records kept at the appropriate medal office, or, more expensively, of recovering an individual's service records from the archives. My hon. Friend will know better than me that that is an appallingly difficult task. Finally, value added tax will be charged if the recipient resides in the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend may be aware that the value of medals can vary widely, even though the prices charged by my Department for certain categories of medal do not. For example, second world war campaign stars, which are issued in significant numbers, like the 1939-45 star or the France and Germany star, have only a marginal "collectors" value once they appear on the open market. In contrast, medals that were issued far less frequently, like the Aircrew Europe star, are worth more than £100 in a dealer's window, yet all three medals are issued as replacements on the pre-payment of just under £13. As my hon. Friend will realise, that is hardly the action of an organisation that seeks to amass profit.

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

In recent years, an increasing number of veterans have reported the loss of their medals for a variety of reasons. Apart from those such as theft or fire, for which little blame could be attached to the owner, other reasons cited have been house moves, medals being pawned or sold by the family or, understandably, medals being mislaid over the passage of time. I regret that, where the loss was avoidable or through simple carelessness, replacement medals clearly cannot be provided.

That will appear harsh on the face of it, but there are sound reasons for that stance. British campaign medals are highly prized, not in monetary terms, but because of what they represent. They are approved by the sovereign and granted for specific service where the rigours and hardship of campaigns justify national recognition. If we were to supply replacement medals on demand, without thought or care as to how the originals have been lost, the honours system's integrity would be undermined. We know that some individuals seek to abuse the system by falsely claiming replacement medals as spares, or more cynically for monetary gain. That is clearly unacceptable.

The onus must be on the owner to take good care of medals awarded by the sovereign on the nation's behalf in gratitude for loyal service. It would be wrong, after all, to use up stocks of medals by issuing them to people who had mislaid them at the expense of people awaiting their first issue.

I am glad that I have had the chance once again to pay tribute to the people who have given such service to this country over the years. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me the opportunity to set out my Department's policy. Although some medals have a high collectors value, it is the emotional and sentimental attachments of those emblems of past honour that are so important and I accept that they are what is so important to Mr. Conn and to his family. I am pleased to report that medals for service rendered many years previously are still available to people entitled to receive them. I confirm that it is the policy that first-issue medals are distributed by a grateful nation free of any charge and I hope that that will always happen.

It is entirely reasonable, however, for the Ministry of Defence to seek pre-payment for any replacement medals that are issued to recipients or their next of kin, following loss beyond their control. I do not consider it an appropriate charge to the taxpayer to pay for such replacements. If people choose not to protect their valuables through a simple insurance policy, that is their choice. If they do not take out insurance, they must be prepared to pay for replacement medals.

As I have said, no one is better qualified or more suited to raise such a matter than my hon. Friend. I hope that he will understand that I deeply regret that I am not able to accede to his request in this case. He has done a signal and valuable service in raising the matter. We have dealt with Mr. Conn's case, as we deal with all medal cases, with great care and diligence. I am most grateful, as I am sure is the House, to my hon. Friend for raising this important matter of behalf of his constituent.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 March 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For the county constituency of South-East Staffordshire, in the room of Sir David Lincoln Lightbown, deceased.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BODMIN MOOR COMMONS BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Disability Living Allowance

1. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on how the changes to the disability living allowance regulations have affected current NHS patients. [18384]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): None. I have received copies of three letters to the Department of Social Security.

Mr. Turner: Does the Minister agree that reducing or abolishing mobility payments will have an adverse effect on the lives of disabled people everywhere?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is not one of the three people who have written to me about that subject. I am not surprised because, as an experienced Member of Parliament, he will know that it is entirely a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Mr. Tom Clarke: This is an important matter for 6.5 million disabled people. Do the Government accept that getting the issue right, in co-operation with the Disablement Income Group, will affect those who suffer from spinal cord injuries, for example? They are not supported by the national health service trusts, which have let them down by not making available the kind of services that they need. Why should disabled people pay for the Government's incompetence and insensitivity?

Mr. Bowis: The question on the Order Paper is not a matter for the Department of Health. The hon. Gentleman has raised issues that relate to my Department, which will play a full part in looking after the interests of disabled people, as he well knows. We have legislation on direct payments before Parliament and—as the hon. Gentleman might have had the grace and courtesy to remind the House and the public—only a few days ago we announced the introduction of the new powered indoor-outdoor wheelchair service for severely disabled people.

Organophosphate Poisoning

2. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many known cases of organophosphate poisoning in England and Wales in 1994 and 1995 were notified to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [18385]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): Suspected adverse reactions involving veterinary medicines are notified to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and those involving pesticides to the Health and Safety Executive, and my Department is informed. Some 47 suspected adverse reactions to organophosphate sheep dips were reported in 1994 and 40 provisionally in 1995 in the United Kingdom. There were 29 cases of suspected organophosphate poisoning from pesticides in Great Britain in 1993-94 and 43 in 1994-95. My Department will shortly be publishing updated guidance for doctors on pesticide poisoning, which includes a reminder of the notification schemes.

Mr. Llwyd: I take no comfort from the Minister's answer, bearing in mind the fact that, since 1985, the Health and Safety Executive has made it a notifiable occurrence. Before long, the Government will be viewed by history as another Nero, who fiddled while Rome burned. While the Department of Health has played ping-pong with the subject—throwing it back and forth to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—thousands of people in England, Wales and Scotland have fallen ill with that terrible disease. When will the Department get to grips with the problem by ensuring that those substances are banned and compensating the thousands of people who have suffered as a result of the illness?

Mr. Horam: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Veterinary Products Committee, which is the appropriate authority, has always said that the pesticides should not be banned. As I said in my original reply, we are issuing new guidance to doctors. The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that the Government are considering the Select Committee report on the matter and taking it very seriously.

Nurses' Work Load

3. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the British Medical Association about the work load of nurses. [18386]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I have not recently met the BMA specifically on the subject of nurses' work load. I am, however, in frequent contact with the medical profession and we discuss a wide range of health issues.

Mr. Marshall: Does the Secretary of State accept that the new deal for junior hospital doctors can be

implemented only with the co-operation of the nursing profession as nurses must adapt their role and take on new responsibilities? Is it not unfair that nurses should be awarded a pay increase of only 2 per cent. whereas junior hospital doctors are to receive an increase of 4.3 to 5.8 per cent?

Mr. Dorrell: I certainly acknowledge that the implementation of the new deal has implications for the nursing work load as well as that of junior doctors. I might have hoped that, in mentioning the implementation of the new deal, the hon. Gentleman would have welcomed the 2,400 new doctor posts that were created under that programme. The hon. Gentleman referred to a 2 per cent. pay increase for nurses. As he knows, that is not the position. As the review body recommended, the Government accepted the proposition that nurses' pay should be negotiated locally, subject to a floor of 2 per cent.

Mrs. Roe: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the warm welcome that will be given to the steps that the Government have taken to ease the work load of junior doctors? Will he confirm that there is now 99 per cent. compliance with the targets to reduce on-call contracted hours for junior doctors to 72 hours per week?

Madam Speaker: Order. The question relates to the work load of nurses.

Mrs. Roe: I beg your pardon, Madam Speaker. I thought that it related to work loads within hospitals—a matter that has been raised by the BMA. The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) referred to doctors in his supplementary question.

Mr. Dorrell: As I said to the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), the implementation of the new deal affects the work load of nurses. My hon. Friend is right to say that the new deal for junior doctors has led to a dramatic reduction in the absurdly extended hours that junior doctors used to work. The review body on nurses also reported:

"The allocation of resources for the NHS for 1996-97 means that most providers should be able to reward staff for improvements in efficiency and effectiveness while delivering increased volume of quality of care to patients."

The review body regarded that as a "win-win" outcome for the NHS.

Mr. Battle: Is the Secretary of State aware that the hospital trusts in Leeds have sent all nurses a letter saying that, from 1 April, they will be covered by new and independent bodies and that their terms and conditions could change? Will it not be the case that in future nurses will be held in reserve and hired and fired on zero-hour contracts that will undermine the profession as young potential nurses will not want to join a profession that has no apparent career structure?

Mr. Dorrell: No. The hon. Gentleman is wrong on virtually every count. By agreement with the unions, new nurses joining the NHS are being recruited on local contracts. The holders of existing national contracts continue to benefit from the terms of those national contracts and the trusts continue to be bound by them.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that we have the best and most professional nurses in the world in our national health service and that we have recognised the special work that they do by the independent pay review body, although there is now an element of local pay bargaining? Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is some concern that, because of the pressure under which nurses are now obliged to work, some people believe that we are taking the care out of nursing and that only the treatment matters when, in a vocational profession such as nursing, care is equally as important as the treatment?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to say that we are blessed in the health service with an immensely dedicated nursing work force, among other professions in the service, and to stress the broader aspects of care for which nurses are famed and their contribution respected. I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome the fact that, since 1979, at a time when earnings in the rest of the economy have risen 36 per cent. in real terms, the Government have seen nurses' earnings rise by a total of 70 per cent. over the same period. That shows the value that we attach to the nursing profession.

Ms Harman: Will the Secretary of State stop being complacent and admit that the British Medical Association is concerned, as we are, about the effect on patients of a shortage of nurses and doctors in accident and emergency departments? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there are in most A and E departments shortages of specialist nurses, junior doctors, middle-grade doctors and even consultants? What action does the Secretary of State plan?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady is still playing the record that she played before Christmas, and she has been proven wrong by events. Before Christmas, the hon. Lady said that we would run into a shortage of junior doctors in A and E departments. I told the House last week that we conducted an audit on the subject a few weeks ago and found that 5 per cent. of junior doctor posts in A and E departments were vacant. The hon. Lady was wrong before Christmas and she remains wrong now.

Health Care

4. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he has had over the future of the independent sector hospitals in the provision of health care. [18387]

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I have met representatives from the Independent Healthcare Association and individual independent health care companies from time to time, to discuss issues of concern to the independent sector.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: My hon. Friend may know that the third largest independent hospital in this country is Benenden hospital in Kent, originally founded for postal workers and their families. Despite the fact that Unison has questioned whether that represents a two-tier system, will my hon. Friend assure the House that he has no intention of denying choice and diversity to trade union and Labour party members who continue to use that excellent hospital for health care outside the national health service?

Mr. Malone: It is rather good to see the words of partnership in the bible that was published 10 days ago

by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) being put into practice by some Labour party members. That particular aspect of the mixed economy in health care is welcome, and I am sure that it will endure.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the Minister confirm that NHS hospitals have been asked to reduce waiting lists in the period leading to the next general election to 12 months wherever possible and that, as a result, Addenbrookes hospital in Cambridge has been contracting patients into private hospitals, including the BUPA hospital in Norwich? Why cannot the NHS provide for NHS patients?

Mr. Malone: I find it extraordinary that the hon. Lady attacks us for reducing NHS waiting lists. I understood that it has been accepted by the Labour party that we have partnership in health care. If the hon. Lady is suggesting that where value for money and effective treatment can be obtained in the private sector, that should be denied to patients, I hope she will explain why to her constituents,who would be denied the sort of health care that they are now receiving if the hon. Lady were ever to get into office.

Coronary Heart Disease

5. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing the incidence of coronary heart disease in England in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [18388]

Mr. Horam: I am pleased to report that the trend in coronary heart disease is in the right direction. Mortality rates for CHD in people under 65 fell by 25 per cent. between 1987 and 1992. Since "The Health of the Nation" report in 1992, the trend has continued with falls of 10.7 per cent. in CHD mortality for under 65s and 7.7 per cent. for the 65 to 74 age group between 1993 and 1994. Progress, therefore, is very encouraging.

Mr. Coombs: The figures that my hon. Friend has given to the House are extremely encouraging, but can he confirm that there are still 140,000 deaths from coronary heart disease every year? Given that fact, how can the Government build on the success so far of "The Health of the Nation" strategy to convince that proportion of the population that continues to believe that it is immortal that that is not the case, and that sensible diet and exercise are worth while?

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend is right. Coronary heart disease is still the major killer and my advice to everyone is to take more regular physical exercise. The House is not setting a good example. You will be aware, Madam Speaker, of the excellent facilities in the Boothroyd studio over the road in the Westminster gym. It is not well used by Members of Parliament and I say to everybody, "Get physical, release your endorphins and feel the stimulus of exercise. Look after your heart and your heart will look after you."

Mr. Kevin Hughes: What has the Minister to say about a recent Audit Commission report which says that access to coronary bypass operations depends on where one happens to live?

Mr. Horam: That is not the case. I have seen the report in question, but I shall certainly look at it again. If that is the hon. Gentleman's impression of the report, it is contrary to mine.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: While it is true that moderate exercise is very good for the health and for the prevention of coronary disease, does my hon. Friend believe that it is reasonable to ask young people to bicycle nine miles to school every day, perhaps to a school in my hon. Friend's constituency? Is it reasonable for parents to ask children to travel those nine miles?

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend has a very real point.

Mr. McLeish: I am sure the Minister will acknowledge that, after the next election, Conservative Members will have more time to do any exercise that they choose. Will the Minister accept that, as 18,000 people die of coronary heart disease every year, we should be making a bigger effort to reduce those figures by more preventative measures and more treatment? Will the Minister also accept that a recently published report by the House of Commons Library shows that 40 per cent. of the district health authorities in England will not make the reduced target of 40 per cent. by 2000? Is not it a disgrace that people on waiting lists are dying because they cannot have access to a bypass operation? When will the Government stop being complacent and introduce policies that will address the real issues in the national health service?

Mr. Horam: If that is the case, I hope that I can count on the partnership of the hon. Gentleman in our Health Education Authority campaign, "Active for Life", which starts next week. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me to promote good habits.

"The Health of the Nation"

6. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the targets set in "The Health of the Nation" in respect of encouraging (a) exercise and (b) a healthy life style. [18389]

Mr. Bowis: Good progress has been made on both.

Mr. Robathan: "The Health of the Nation" report rightly stresses the importance of physical activity and exercise—to follow on from the last question. Will my hon. Friend speak to his colleagues at the Departments of Transport, of the Environment, and for Education and Employment and ask them to encourage people to walk and to bicycle rather than to use private cars? Will my hon. Friend note especially that only 2 per cent. of schoolchildren in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), as elsewhere, now bicycle to school, whereas a huge number travel by private car? Does my hon. Friend believe that the House could set a better example and can he think of anybody who could set a better example in physical exercise?

Mr. Bowis: I cannot think what my hon. Friend means. The basic thrust of his energetic question is right. Moderate exercise is what is required, and a modest increase in the level of exercise taken by all of us would be beneficial. School sports certainly have a part to play—

which is why it is such a pity that, not so many years ago, Labour authorities such as the Inner London education authority banned competitive sports.

Mr. Simon Hughes: In "The Health of the Nation", published in 1992, the Government set a target for reducing smoking by 11 to 15-year-olds by 33 per cent. within two years—by 1994. In fact, over that period smoking in that age group that rose by 20 per cent, according to a survey at the end of last year—especially among girls. When will the Government follow the advice of the chief medical officer and support a ban on tobacco advertising? When will they support the Bill which hon. Members on both sides of the House, including me, are promoting to discourage youngsters from smoking? Without that, youngsters will keep smoking throughout adult life and kill themselves much earlier.

Mr. Bowis: It is certainly true that not smoking is part of a healthy life style, but the hon. Gentleman is not quite right about 11 to 15-year-olds. Over the 10 years to 1994, there was a slight decrease in smoking among young boys, while the figure for young girls remained steady. That is not good enough; I want to reduce the numbers.

All the evidence shows that it is not advertising, but price and parental example, that has an impact. On that basis, we are setting an example that the rest of Europe should follow.

Mr. Garnier: With regard to the target set in "The Health of the Nation", will my hon. Friend encourage and commend the work of district nurses, community health nurses and school nurses, especially those employed by the Fosse health trust in Leicestershire, who have done a tremendous amount of work to encourage all sections of the community, from schoolchildren to elderly people, to take moderate, healthy exercise so as to fulfil the targets to which my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) referred?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. and learned Friend is right. We seek not a maoist regime of collective physical jerks but an informed society of people with the facts about exercise and life styles, who can then decide for themselves and their families what to do. There is clear evidence, as my hon. and learned Friend rightly says, that the nursing community plays its part in this. If we can get across the message about moderate exercise, moderate drinking, knowing how to cope with stress, and cutting out tobacco and drugs, we shall end up with a healthier nation that will meet "The Health of the Nation" targets.

Mr. Barron: The targets for smoking among 11 to 15-year-olds set by "The Health of the Nation" were for a total of 6 per cent., but the figure is currently double that, so the Government are clearly failing to dissuade teenagers from starting to smoke. On the eve of national no-smoking day, what further action do the Government propose to take, given that they are clearly failing our young people?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to national no-smoking day, which we confidently expect to lead to another 40,000 people giving up. He will also want to welcome the work being done in the campaign to persuade people to stop smoking, or not to start it, and in the three-year campaign, about to start in April, aimed at young people. The Government, the health service and the nation make tremendous efforts to persuade young people to understand the facts about smoking; and we reinforce that with a price mechanism which results in part from the Chancellor's commitment to an annual 3 per cent. real terms increase in tobacco prices. Price and example are the ways to stop young people smoking and persuade them not to start.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Is my hon. Friend aware that the oldest person in the world, Jeanne Calment, recently celebrated her 121st birthday and reportedly gave up smoking at the age of 117? Does he think that there are lessons in that for a healthy life style? If so, what are they?

Mr. Bowis: I suspect that the message is to give up smoking at least four years before becoming the oldest person in the world.

District Health Authorities

8. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what adjustments he plans to make in the basis of the capitation formula for funding district health authorities. [18392]

Mr. Horam: The weighted capitation formula is kept under constant review, and a number of refinements are planned over the next few years.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that, even with the York refinements, the present formula is unsatisfactory, as shown by the fact that, until recently, a psychiatric consultant in Newham was dealing with a case load that was double the national average? Does the Minister agree that the 12 per cent. that is allocated to psychiatric care is unrealistic and that the 24 per cent. allocated to community care is inadequate? Should not whatever cake that is provided by the Treasury be divided equitably and be seen to have been so?

Mr. Horam: I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but we are refining the formula continually. On his point about psychiatric care, we are developing the index for community health services. It may not quite be ready for the next allocation, but none the less work is being done on it, which, I am sure, will benefit his area.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister's efforts to persuade public bodies and others to use the funding with which they are provided to pay the bills of those who supply the NHS will be welcomed by those suppliers? Does my hon. Friend recall that, in 1975, under a Labour Government, when inflation was running at 27 per cent., there was no inducement to pay bills promptly, and hospital treasurers referred to 31 March as the longest day in the year, because they did not close their books on 31 March, and did not pay their bills until the end of April?

Mr. Horam: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I certainly agree that the Prime Minister's initiative yesterday to publish a list of shame of Departments and

the way in which they dealt with small companies is appropriate. I hope that the Department of Health will not come at the bottom of that list.

Private Finance Initiative

9. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many projects for health facilities in England are currently subject to consideration under the private finance initiative. [18393]

Mr. Dorrell: All capital investment proposals in the national health service are considered for suitability for private finance as part of the capital planning process.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Secretary of State accept that some projects and locations are singularly inappropriate for private finance? Will he give the House an assurance that the Government will not impose private finance criteria on inappropriate projects, thereby delaying them for long periods when they could have made rapid progress?

Mr. Dorrell: I acknowledge that there are schemes for which public capital continues to be necessary. That is why there is still a huge public capital investment programme in the NHS. I also believe it true that the private finance initiative offers us the best opportunity that we have had in the history of the NHS to bring the facilities of the health service up to date and to give the best possible opportunity to the professions working in it to use modern technology and modern facilities to deliver the best health care to our patients.

Dame Jill Knight: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the PFI is one of the great NHS successes? Bearing in mind its success, would he like to open a book as to when the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) might decide on this one to change tack again, to follow her leader and to back the PFI?

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's assertion that the PFI is an exciting thing happening in the health service.

Ms Harman: Nothing has happened.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady might like to take into account the fact that, over the past 10 years, despite the fact that the capital programme has been much bigger than it ever was under the previous Government, more than 10 projects—costing more than £25 million—have been given the go-ahead. That is 10 projects in 10 years. I have given the go-ahead to two more projects over the past three months. The hon. Lady knows that another 23 such projects are currently being assessed in the NHS. She seems to think it surprising that a project for which we announced a go-ahead in principle three months ago, costing £40 million, has not yet been signed in every particular. She is virtually unique in thinking that.

Mrs. Mahon: The Secretary of State will be aware that the tenders have gone out for the building of the new Halifax general hospital, and Tarmac, Mediclean or another company will presumably get the contract. Will he, first, give us his definition of clinical services and, secondly, give the people of Halifax a guarantee that their clinical services will not be put out to tender or run by such private companies?

Mr. Dorrell: I have given the assurance many times that I shall not approve private finance projects, the viability of which depend on clinical or clinical support services being delivered by the private contractor, unless there is clinical support locally for that particular scenario. That has been the position in the health service for many years now and I do not propose to change it.

Mr. Gallie: Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents can now use a magnetic resonance imaging facility in the South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS trust? It used a modified PFI, setting up a non-profit-making private company to provide that facility. Is that not tremendous news and a great example to every trust throughout the country?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What he recounts is good news for his constituents and it is good news for every citizen of the United Kingdom because it shows the way by which we will be able progressively to improve the capital stock of the NHS. My hon. Friend is a trail-blazer. My hon. Friends will all want to follow where he has led.

Prescription Charges

10. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many increases there have been in prescription charges since 1979. [18394]

Mr. Malone: Sixteen.

Mr. Banks: If I had not heard that answer of 16 prescription increases from the lips of a Minister of the Crown, I simply would not have believed it. Does the Minister recall that in 1979 the prescription charge was 20p and, if that had been raised in line with inflation, it would still have been only 51p today instead of £5.50? Is it not also a fact that most of the commonly prescribed drugs cost less than the prescription charge? Prescription charges are a rip-off and, what is more, they are an inefficient rip-off. What miserable, pathetic, cringing excuse has the Minister to offer?

Mr. Malone: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I have a few facts which might put what he has been saying in perspective. First, I hope that he understands that prescription charges will contribute £310 million next year to health care. How, if the hon. Gentleman were choosing to modify that policy, would he replace those funds? I hope that he also understands that the average cost of a prescribed item is £9.30, so the prescription charge is two thirds the average cost of the prescribed item. Those are important contributions to NHS health care. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman might well welcome them.

Mr. Booth: While my hon. Friend is asked to take tablets of scorn from Opposition Members, will he accept

a dose of pride from Conservative Members? What other country in the world has 80 per cent. of all its prescription charges, regardless of cost, completely free to patients?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of that fact, but that is last year's figure. I am pleased to tell him that, according to next year's estimates, that figure will increase to 85 per cent.

Mr. Ashton: Where did the Minister get that figure of £9 from? Has he taken the highest prescription cost and the lowest to get that average, or has he taken the average of the pyramid of all drugs?

Mr. Malone: The figure of £9.30 is an average of all items that are prescribed. I am delighted to confirm that the charge still represents good value for money for what those who make the contribution to the NHS pay. If it is put in perspective, it will be seen by the country to be very good value indeed.

Mr. Devlin: Will my hon. Friend remind us who introduced prescription charges and who, after abolishing them briefly, reintroduced them at a higher rate? Will he also tell us by how much prescription charges are likely to fall under a Labour Government after a careful examination of the policy documents put out by the Labour party?

Mr. Malone: On the second point, my hon. Friend will get absolutely no answer from the Opposition. He is right: he need look no further than the Opposition to find the answers to his first two questions.

Young Girls (Smokers)

11. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of 15-year-old girls who smoke regularly. [18395]

Mr. Bowis: The survey conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys showed that, in 1994, 30 per cent. of 15-year-old girls reported that they smoked at least one cigarette a week.

Ms Lynne: One of the Government's reasons for not banning tobacco advertising is that it has little effect on young people taking up smoking, so why are the Government spending £800,000 on advertising smoking's dangers to teenagers? I know that that is a small amount of money, but if it has no effect, why bother to spend it?

Mr. Bowis: We do not say that advertising has no effect, which is why we have gone to great lengths to reach a voluntary agreement with the tobacco industry. That agreement has successfully reduced advertising at places where young people are. There has been a 70 per cent. cut in poster advertising. We have cut shop-front and bus advertising. There are controls on advertising within 200 m of a school and close to playgrounds. Price and example are the two key ways to stop young people smoking. The hon. Lady should recall that in Spain, where smoking is a major problem, the price of cigarettes is 56p a pack, but in this country it is £2.74 a pack. Since 1990, consumption of cigarettes here has decreased by 15 billion cigarettes a year. That is the way to success.

Mr. Sims: It is of course right for Ministers to encourage a healthy life style, as my hon. Friends have been doing this afternoon, but is it not also their duty to discourage people, especially young people, from smoking? My hon. Friend has enumerated a number of factors, but there is ample evidence that advertising is also a factor. Why do the Government resolutely set their face against the advice that they have received to impose a ban on tobacco product advertising?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right in saying that we must go on seeking to influence young people, but the evidence that we have received is that a total ban on advertising would not be effective. The voluntary route that we and the Netherlands have followed is effective. We have had clear evidence that we need to go on educating young people about tobacco, keeping the price up, and encouraging parents and others to stop smoking, because smoking parents often lead to smoking children. That is the purpose of our campaigns, which have led to decreases in the number of people who smoke. Whereas in 1974, 45 per cent. of people smoked, in 1992 that figure had fallen to 28 per cent.

Mr. Miller: If the Minister is serious about this, why is it that prescription charges, for medicines that people need, have gone up faster than cigarette prices, for drugs that people do not need?

Mr. Bowis: That is a totally different question. We have one question about people who can afford to pay contributing to the cost of their medication—with, as we have heard, a colossal exemption in this country for people who cannot afford to—and another about ways of encouraging people not to smoke because it can harm their health. The price of cigarettes and the example set by parents, older brothers and sisters and other role models are crucial in winning that battle.

GP Fundholding (Lichfield)

12. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement concerning general practitioner fundholding in Lichfield. [18396]

Mr. Malone: Fundholding has brought considerable benefits to the people of Lichfield—not least improved physiotherapy and day care services at Victoria hospital. I expect all general practitioners in Lichfield to be fundholding from April.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend recall the prophetic words of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) when she said that general practitioners do not support the concept of fundholding? Does not the fact that, by April, every GP in Lichfield will be a fundholder show that she was just a false prophet?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Lady wishes to abolish fundholding not only for everyone in Lichfield who will be served by it from April but for everyone else.

The example in Lichfield is being followed in the rest of the country. From April, fundholding will cover more than 50 per cent. of England's population.

Medical Research Grants

14. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds his Department grants to medical research. [18398]

Mr. Dorrell: Expenditure from my Department's budget devoted to research and development in 1995-96 is expected to total £454 million. As well as the centrally funded programmes of research, that includes NHS expenditure on research and research-related activities. We are currently implementing the recommendations of the Culyer report, which are designed to strengthen our commitment to research and development.

Mr. Booth: When will my right hon. Friend and the Government spend much more on the hundreds of thousands of children who suffer from autism? Does not that subject need more Government funds?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to point to the importance of research and development to the future of mental health services. It is for exactly that reason that the directorate of research and development has said that it intends to use its increasing budget to commit extra resources to research and development in the broader field of mental health.

PRIME MINISTER

Deregulation

Q1. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will establish a league table of deregulation initiatives from each Government Department. [18414]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome the further measures that I announced yesterday on simplified tax registration, new rights for business against enforcement action and simplified planning and development controls. I have arranged for a copy of details of the number of regulations repealed or amended by each Department to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Steen: I understand my right hon. Friend's reluctance to cover the walls of No. 10 Downing street with deregulation league tables. If he did so, however, it would highlight the difference between his approach to small firms and that of the Opposition, which will certainly increase the number of rules and regulations emanating not only from this country but from Europe. Will my right hon. Friend boost his own excellent approach by promoting Ministers—and, indeed, Back Benchers—who have good ideas on deregulation, and demoting those who have not? Perhaps he will have a word with the Leader of the Opposition, suggesting that he take similar action with his Front Benchers.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of deregulation. We have undertaken comprehensive consultation with small businesses, and, as a result of what they had to say to us, we have set out a comprehensive range of action which will, I believe, have been welcomed across the small business sector. I very much regret the necessity to place extra burdens on business sometimes, but we are utterly resolute in not accepting burdens such as the social chapter which would undoubtedly make the country inefficient and cost us jobs. Small firms are the life-blood of the economy, and they deserve our support.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 March. [18415]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Prime Minister recall that last Thursday he gave the House the clear impression that the Government had no intention of taking away the employment protection rights of 10 million workers in private businesses? The very same day, he was contradicted by the Deputy Prime Minister. Who really speaks for the Government, and what is the true position?

The Prime Minister: In no sense did my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister contradict what I said yesterday. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, Madam Speaker, but noise from the Opposition does not make them right; they are just as wrong whether they are noisy or silent.

I made it clear that I had no intention of announcing those changes yesterday; nor did I. I also made it clear that we intended to look at unnecessary regulations across the board: I made that clear to the House. Nothing is automatically exempt, but, having been examined, nothing will automatically be changed unless the examination suggests that that is worth while.

Sir Terence Higgins: As the referendum is an alien concept inconsistent with our system of representative parliamentary democracy, would it not be a mistake to change the Government's policy on the issue? On a single currency referendum, does my right hon. Friend agree that a single currency, in the sense that every member of the European Union gives up its own currency in favour of it, is not likely to happen before the next general election, the one after or the one after that and that a referendum on a core currency, which would split the Union, is even less likely to produce a sensible result?

The Prime Minister: As I have said to the House before, let me say again to my right hon. Friend that there are circumstances in which we think that it might be appropriate to have a referendum on the particular matter of whether this country should decide to join a single currency, were one to go ahead in 1999. I have made that point to the House before; that is a matter under consideration and it remains so.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister recall that he used to be flatly against a referendum on a single currency and then—

Mr. Ashby: Tell us your policies.

Madam Speaker: Order. Mr. Ashby, you are not at a football match now.

Mr. Blair: And then the Prime Minister's position changed to say that the question of whether to have a referendum would not arise until after a British Cabinet had recommended joining a single currency. That was the position reiterated a few days ago by the Chancellor of the Exchequer: it would be postponed until the decision about the single currency. Is that still the Government's position?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to swap quotes on these matters—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] If the House is patient, I will come directly to the right hon. Gentleman's point, but I remind him, on the subject of consistency, that he once said:

"we'll negotiate a withdrawal from the EEC".

To be strictly fair, he did subsequently say that he

"wasn't actually opposed to membership of the EC . . . I said at the election, within the closed doors of the Labour Party, that I disagreed with that policy on Europe."

The right hon. Gentleman did not of course say that publicly, which one might have expected from such an ambitious Member.

I have often said before that, although I do not in general favour referendums in our parliamentary democracy, there are circumstances in which one might be appropriate. One of those circumstances is were the Cabinet to make a decision to join a single currency. I have made that clear; that is still the case. We are examining at the moment what the appropriate circumstances might be. When we have completed that examination, I will ensure that the right hon. Gentleman is among the first few hundred people to know.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. Gentleman did not actually tell us whether the Chancellor's position remains the position of the Government. Can I put this question to him? Is it still his view that collective responsibility during the course of such a referendum would still apply?

The Prime Minister: The fact is, on the first point, that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was with me and agreed in Cabinet to the examination that we are undertaking. The examination that we are undertaking covers not only the point that the right hon. Gentleman raised but a series of other important points that would need to be clear were such a decision to be taken.

Mr. Blair: So everything is up for review. The right hon. Gentleman used to be flatly against a referendum; now he cannot say. He used to be in favour of collective responsibility; now he cannot say. Is it not the truth that on this issue—*[Interruption.]* They do not like it, Madam Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman now cannot say on either issue. Is it not the truth that, on this issue, as in so many other areas, he is no longer able to be a Prime Minister taking these decisions in the interests of the country but is simply a full-time party manager trying to manage irreconcilable factions in his own party?

The Prime Minister: One of these days, the right hon. Gentleman will learn to quit when he is losing. *[Interruption.]* He just made it perfectly clear that he has no interest in collective responsibility, no interest in Cabinet government and no interest in the Cabinet discussing these matters—which is precisely what his Back Benchers say about the way in which he determines his own policies. When he has had a little more experience, he will realise that that will never work in government.

Mr. Churchill: Is it not fantastic that the European Court, the European Commission and the leader of the Labour party should be so hellbent on pricing British and European workers out of jobs and exporting those jobs to the Pacific rim? If people in this country choose, of their own volition, to work 48 hours or more a week, why on earth should not they be allowed to do so?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I strongly disagree with the ruling of the Advocate General this morning. We have one of the best records on health and safety at work across Europe. I do not believe that the working time directive can make any significant contribution to health and safety. We shall continue to argue the case that these matters are best agreed between employers and employees in the light of their own circumstances.

European legislation such as the working time directive is ludicrous, and we will continue to tell our partners in Europe that that is so. It is precisely because of legislation like that and stupidities like that, that the European Union is becoming uncompetitive and losing jobs to other parts of the world. It is complete nonsense and it is time that people began to stand up and say so.

Mr. Ashdown: So why did not the Prime Minister and the Government vote against the directive in the Council of Ministers? As the Prime Minister is in the business of swapping quotes, I shall remind him of two. In June 1992 he said to me, "I am not in favour of referendums and I will not put one before the British people." Last week he said, "I have never changed my view—it remains that a referendum might be the course of action to take."

Is it not perfectly clear that the right hon. Gentleman is not the leader of his party, but the prisoner of his party? How long will it now take for him to join us in saying that, when it comes to deciding Britain's future in Europe, Britain's people have a right to a say?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will know that his hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) has in the past admitted the differences in their party on the question of a referendum. He knows that there are sharp differences. The right hon. Gentleman has said that he favours a referendum on this issue. He should not be so uncharacteristically modest—has it not occurred to him that his splendid advocacy might just possibly change my hon. Friends' minds?

Mr. Hayes: If my right hon. Friend has the good fortune to bump into Sir James Goldsmith, will he remind

him that, although he might think that wealth can buy privilege, it does not buy Members of Parliament and it does not buy Governments?

The Prime Minister: The only things for sale in this House are Labour party policies to the trade unions. *[Interruption.]* The deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), says, "Change the computer." We would like him to change the fact that half the Labour party's policies are determined by the trade unions, that most of its money comes from the trade unions, that it is the handmaiden of the trade unions and that it has no independence. The trade unions pay for the Labour party and they own it—it was that way, it is that way and it always will be that way.

Q3. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 March. [18416]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Prime Minister remember saying in April 1992, "Vote Conservative on Thursday and the recovery will continue on Friday"? When he became Prime Minister, the unemployment figure was 1,754,811, but in January this year it was 2,224,207. They are his figures. What went wrong?

The Prime Minister: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what has gone right with our economy, and he can then compare what has happened in this country with what has happened in other countries. If he is worrying about what has gone wrong, he should look at Liverpool council to get an indication. The leader of the Labour party said, I think, to *The Spectator* some time ago that one does not know the character of a party until it is in power. We have seen Labour in power in Liverpool council, and we know exactly the character of the Labour party.

I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what has happened in Britain. We have the lowest sustained rate of inflation for almost 50 years—it is below 3 per cent; we have the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years; we have an unemployment rate well below the European Union average; we have the lowest basic rate of tax for 50 years; we are the largest recipients of foreign investment outside Europe, into Europe and more than the rest of Europe added together; and we export more per person than any other country in Europe. In spite of the pantomime drivellings of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, that is what has happened in this country, and it is time that he woke up and saw it. It surely would not have happened with any other Government.

Intergovernmental Conference (White Paper)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the forthcoming intergovernmental conference.

Britain has a vision of Europe that is reflected in the White Paper that we are publishing today, which is entitled "A Partnership of Nations". We want to see a Europe that respects cultural and political diversity; that does only those things at the European level that need to be done at that level; and that is outward-looking, free-trading, democratic and flexible—a partnership of nations working together to advance their national interests. The intergovernmental conference is, of course, only one means available to us through which we intend to realise our objectives. We shall continue to work tirelessly in all the other forums for the same goal.

Successive British Governments have seen the European Union as a means of safeguarding stability and creating prosperity in Europe. There have been frustrations and controversies, but, overall, the United Kingdom has greatly benefited from more than 20 years of membership.

The Government approach the launch of the intergovernmental conference in Turin on 29 March unambiguously committed to our membership of the European Union. We shall play a leading role in the Union as one of Europe's biggest and most powerful nations. Britain's voice is influential and it has helped shape the European Community in the past. Britain was the pioneer of the single market. We have been one of the leading advocates of enlargement and of a European Union open to the world. The Government believe that the European Union will succeed only if it respects the integrity of the independent democratic nation states that comprise its membership and if it is flexible enough to accommodate their political and cultural differences. The Government are totally opposed to a monolithic, centralised, federal Europe.

The treaty on European Union—like the original treaty of Rome—calls for an

"ever closer union among the peoples of Europe"—

not, let it be noted, among the states of Europe or among their Governments. That aspiration for strengthened co-operation and friendship across the whole of Europe is a noble one, and is fully shared by the Government. However, it should not mean an ever closer political union in the sense of an inexorable drift of power towards supra-national institutions, the erosion of the powers of national Parliaments or the gradual development of a united states of Europe. The Government reject that conception of Europe's future. That is why it is crucial that national Parliaments remain the central focus of democratic legitimacy. Europe must develop with the instincts of free people in free nations. As the European Union matures, it needs a clearer sense of what it is and of what it should never aspire to be. Those principles are closely adhered to in the White Paper.

The intergovernmental conference is obviously important to the European Union's future, but it is not the only, or perhaps even the most important, challenge confronting the Union. Outside the intergovernmental conference, we must prepare for the enlargement of the Union to the east and the south, which will involve the Herculean task of reforming the Community's agricultural and regional policies. Meanwhile, we cannot ignore the urgent need to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and thereby generate new jobs. There will also be hard choices to make on a single currency and on the Union's future financing. Those crucial matters do not fall within the scope of the intergovernmental conference, although the United Kingdom is developing clear and robust policies in each area.

The Maastricht treaty came into force little more than two years ago. We agree with the conclusion of the study group that was set up to prepare for the IGC that

"the Conference should focus on necessary changes, without embarking on a complete revision of the Treaty".

British objectives, such as a major reform of the common agricultural policy, do not need treaty amendment and will be pursued in other negotiations.

The IGC has yet to begin. In common with other member states, the Government are still considering their detailed approach. We may have further proposals to make as the negotiations proceed. The following represent our specific proposals for this intergovernmental conference.

First is subsidiarity. That is the key to ensuring that the Union concentrates single-mindedly on doing what needs to be done at a European level, and only that. The United Kingdom introduced that vital concept into the treaty of Maastricht. The principle has been developed at subsequent European Councils. It is having the effect that we intended, but more clarity is needed in the treaty. We shall therefore make proposals at the intergovernmental conference to entrench subsidiarity still further in the treaty.

Secondly, we are concerned at the way in which certain directives have been used or may be used for purposes that were never intended by the Governments who agreed to them—for example, health and safety articles that may be used for social policy, or fiscal measures that may be added on to single market or environmental proposals. Another example is the common fisheries policy, where the practice of "quota hopping" is preventing fishing communities from enjoying a secure benefit from national quotas, thereby undermining their entire purpose. The Government do not believe that directives, once enacted, are irreversible, and will press for treaty amendment if that proves to be the best way of ensuring that the original purpose of those directives is fully respected.

Thirdly, the President of the Commission, Jacques Santer, has said that the Union should do "less but better". Britain agrees. The volume of new legislative proposals being put forward has been falling rapidly, with only 19 proposals for principal legislation expected in 1996 compared with 61 in 1990, but there is also an urgent need to improve the quality of European legislation, and we shall be pressing for a range of measures to achieve that, including much wider consultation of interested parties via the Commission before proposals are put forward, and the automatic withdrawal of proposals that are not adopted by the Council within a given time.

Fourthly, national Parliaments are the primary focus of democratic legitimacy in the Union. The House, like the Government, rightly attaches importance to the role of

national Parliaments in European Union decision making. We have taken careful note of views expressed in several helpful reports by Committees of the House.

We are examining a range of ideas, including a binding period for Parliaments to scrutinise Community documents before decisions are taken in the Council, and a greater role for national Parliaments in the justice and home affairs pillar.

The European Parliament, by contrast, already has a major role in the European legislative process, including a number of new powers acquired at Maastricht, some of which have yet to be fully tested. The Government do not, therefore, see the case for new powers for the European Parliament at the expense of national Parliaments or Governments.

Fifthly, we believe that foreign and defence policy must remain the responsibility of national Governments. The common foreign and security policy has, since its inception, achieved more than many had expected. It is in this country's national interest that members of the European Union should speak and act together on the world stage where our objectives are the same. Our joint support for the middle east peace process or for democratic institutions and market economies in central and eastern Europe is an obvious example. We shall be pressing for a more effective common foreign and security policy at the forthcoming conference. But, crucially, Britain believes that the common foreign and security policy must remain based on unanimity and be intergovernmental in character if it is to succeed. As the House knows, I put forward our ideas in a speech in Paris last week. Ultimately, the common foreign and security policy will carry weight internationally only if it represents a genuinely common policy, not a majority one.

Sixthly, the intergovernmental conference will also be considering the arrangements for European defence co-operation. The Government set out their approach in a full memorandum last year. That memorandum has been attached to the White Paper that is being issued today. We believe that it would be useful to improve defence co-operation in Europe by closer co-operation between the European Union and the Western European Union. We do not, however, believe in the integration of those two bodies or in the subordination of the WEU to the European Union. NATO must remain the bedrock of western security. The European Union, four of whose member states are neutrals, and which are neither in NATO nor in the WEU, cannot expect to take decisions on defence policy or on the use of military forces.

Seventhly, co-operation in justice and home affairs will be of particular importance in the intergovernmental conference, because terrorism, organised crime, illegal immigration and drug trafficking are among the greatest challenges facing modern society. They require a co-ordinated, multinational response. Substantial progress has been achieved in the past few years in that area, and Britain has proposals for improving that co-operation. But, as with foreign policy, the Government believe that those issues must remain intergovernmental and subject to unanimity if they are to carry the support of the peoples of Europe. Those are matters of high political sensitivity, involving questions of national sovereignty.

Eighthly, the European Court of Justice is another area in which we shall be pressing for improvements at the intergovernmental conference. Britain is committed to a strong and independent Court, without which it would be impossible to ensure even application of Community law or to prevent abuse of power by the Community's institutions. But the functioning of the court can and, in the Government's view, must be improved. There is very great concern that the court's interpretations sometimes seem to go beyond what Governments intended when laws were framed.

The Government are working up a number of proposals to enable the court to address those concerns better. They include: strengthening the ability of the court to limit retrospective application of its judgments; introducing the principle that a member state should be liable for damages only in cases of serious and manifest breach of its obligations; applying national time limits to all cases based on European Community laws, except where the member state's failure to implement a directive is in serious and manifest breach of its obligations; an internal appeals procedure; streamlined procedures for the rapid amendment of European Community legislation that has been interpreted in a way that was never intended by the Council; an accelerated procedure for time-sensitive cases; and a treaty provision clarifying the application of subsidiarity in the interpretation of Community laws. The Government will shortly be issuing a memorandum setting out their proposals in detail.

Ninthly, certain changes to the Council voting system will be necessary if the Union is to continue to function democratically in an enlarged Union. At present, the system of weighted votes is biased against the larger member states. There is growing acceptance across Europe that a way must be found to address that imbalance. Possible alternatives include changing the number of votes of larger countries so that population is better reflected. What is clear is that the system must not allow countries representing a significant percentage of the European Union's population or the major net contributors as a group to be outvoted.

Tenthly, as the Union enlarges to as many as 27 members, it will be necessary to change the current policy whereby every member state, however small, has a Commissioner and is responsible for a six-month presidency. Such a structure would quickly become unworkable in an enlarged Union.

As the White Paper makes clear, there are a number of other specific areas where the Government see scope for improving the treaty at this intergovernmental conference. Those areas include animal welfare and possible changes to the common fisheries policy, as announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food last week. There are many areas where the countries of the Union could and should co-operate more closely in their own national interests, and in the interest of Europe as a whole. But at a time when there is concern about Europe trying to do too much, we do not believe that the rules on qualified majority voting in the treaty should be changed to make it easier to override national concerns in matters of particular sensitivity. That is why we shall oppose the extension of majority voting at the intergovernmental conference.

Nor do we favour further harmonisation or the extension of Community competence in the area of employment. The need to create jobs is one of the highest priorities facing the European Union. But jobs cannot be wished into being simply by legislating for them; it is

[Mr. Malcolm Rifkind]

businesses that make jobs. That is why the Prime Minister negotiated Britain's social chapter opt-out at Maastricht—and our opt-out is here to stay.

The Government approach this intergovernmental conference with confidence and determination. This country's national interest is the starting point for our approach as, for all free nations, the national interest can be defined as the collective expression of the democratic process. In many spheres, our national interest coincides with that of our European partners and, in those spheres, working with our partners enables our collective effort better to achieve our ends. We shall argue constructively for treaty changes to improve the operation of the Union. We want to strengthen the treaty so that Europe can face and overcome the challenges ahead and, in particular, so that we can prepare for further enlargement.

As I have said, the conference is only one forum where we shall press for our vision of Europe. There are others and we shall argue robustly in all of them. Britain will be at the heart of the debate about the future of the European Union, because it is our future and we can best shape our national destiny by working with our closest neighbours to make a strong and effective partnership of nations.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): As Britain approaches the important intergovernmental conference, it is obviously in the national interest that we should, wherever possible, seek agreement on the agenda for that IGC. I therefore begin by welcoming the matters on which we agree with the Government's approach.

Does the Foreign Secretary accept that we endorse what he said about the justice and home affairs pillars and the common foreign and security policy? Both subjects should be dealt with by intergovernmental agreement rather than through participation of the European institutions. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the common foreign and security policy must remain a common policy, not a majority foreign and security policy? Does he accept that he will have our full support in resisting any defence competence for the European Union, which is not where Britain should look for its security interests?

We support entirely what the Foreign Secretary said about the importance of subsidiarity in making Europe more accountable to the people, by bringing decisions closer to them. Our only regret is that the Government do not practise subsidiarity in Britain. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that if the Government are successful in winning back some powers from Brussels, they should not keep all those powers to themselves, but should decentralise some of them from Whitehall?

I entirely endorse what the Foreign Secretary said about the importance of the enlargement of the European Union. There can be no greater mission for western Europe than to open its doors to the new democracies of central and eastern Europe, and to support democracy in those countries as well as the stability of their borders. If, however, the Government's commitment to enlargement is to be taken seriously, the Foreign Secretary must answer the following question. Does he believe that the European Union can admit another 10 or 15 members, each clutching a veto over the full range of issues that are now settled by unanimous vote? Does he accept that he has our full support in retaining a British veto on taxation, on changes to the treaty and on strategic political issues? Does he accept also that many people will consider the Government hypocritical when they discover that, after the Government presided over the massive extension of qualified majority voting and the Single European Act, opposition to qualified majority voting is now a guiding principle? Finally, I welcome most of all the positive tone of much of his statement.

The Foreign Secretary began by reminding the House that Britain had benefited greatly from 20 years' membership of the European Union. He ended by saying that we must work closely with our neighbours to ensure a strong and effective partnership. The Foreign Secretary's problem is that many of his hon. Friends do not agree with either statement. Is that not why neither his White Paper nor his statement has anything positive to offer on the three major issues facing Europe? Does he accept that Opposition Members believe that the top priority of European policy should be the provision of jobs?

Why then does the White Paper rule out the proposal before the IGC that the treaty should be amended to include employment as an objective of the European Union? The Government agreed at Maastricht to set targets on inflation, interest rates, fiscal deficits and national debt. Why can they not agree that a priority for the IGC should be to balance those monetary targets with a commitment to employment?

The Foreign Secretary said that the opt-out on the social chapter is "here to stay". Does he accept that the opt-out will go when this Government go? Does the Foreign Secretary not know that two thirds of the public want Britain to join the social chapter? Why should they not have a Government who speak for them at the IGC? Why should the workers of Britain be denied the same rights to information and consultation about the future of their country as those who work in Europe? The social chapter is a competitive issue: how do the Government, in the age of the knowledge industries, imagine that Britain can be competitive when the work force is kept in the dark?

The greatest omission from the Foreign Secretary's statement and from the White Paper was any contribution to the debate on the single currency. Does the Foreign Secretary not understand that no one will believe his claim that the White Paper does not discuss the single currency issue because it is not part of the IGC's formal agenda? Everyone knows that the real reason why the White Paper does not mention the single currency is that Conservative Members cannot agree on what to say about it.

Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the views of his colleague the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who tells us that he is sympathetic to the single currency, or does he agree with the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who tells us that the Conservatives would never give up the pound? The reality is that the Foreign Secretary dare not present a White Paper that tells us where the Government stand, because he knows that it would not be possible for both his colleagues to vote for it. Will he accept the simple, honest truth that no British Government can join a single currency without the consent of the British people?

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has produced a White Paper that tries to please everyone, but the result will please no one. The Government cannot make progress in Europe because they are paralysed by

divisions at home. Britain needs a Government who can provide a lead for Britain in the IGC on an agenda of reform for Europe. The Foreign Secretary's statement and his White Paper's silence about the great issues facing Europe have demonstrated why Britain cannot have such a Government until it gets a change of Government.

Mr. Rifkind: It is rather rich for the hon. Gentleman to remind me that some of my hon. Friends might not take the view that the European Union has been good for Britain, when he spent his first 20 years in the House and several general elections campaigning to take us out of the European Union. He went on to comment about jobs. The Labour party, as represented by the hon. Gentleman, invites derision by pontificating about the need to help employment in this country while simultaneously seeking to impose upon industry the social chapter, which, as the Labour deputy leader admitted, would destroy jobs in Britain.

The hon. Gentleman was careful not to point out that the Labour party is already committed to removing the British veto on social policy, regional policy, environmental policy and industrial policy. Its documents say explicitly that there would be no permanent opt-outs under a Labour Government. If that means anything, it means that a Labour Government would roll over and lie down whenever a majority wished to press for some other proposal. When the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues say that they would never be isolated in Europe, that appears to mean that they would rather be popular than right. As long as they take that position, their views on the European Union do not deserve the respect of the House or of the country.

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): May I welcome much of what is in the White Paper and what my right hon. and learned Friend said about qualified majority voting and about the European Parliament, if we have to have one? Is not the real test of what my right hon. and learned Friend has said whether, over the next few years, Britain can avoid being sucked into a European state of the kind that many of our partners want, as I discovered at the previous intergovernmental conference? Does he know of any organisation in history that had an elected Parliament, a supreme court, a passport, a right of citizenship and a single currency, but was not a state?

Mr. Rifkind: I entirely accept from my right hon. Friend that the European Union is unprecedented. It will be unprecedented whether it remains in its present form, as we would like, or whether other member states press for it to go further. It is already unique, even in its present form. I remind my right hon. Friend that any changes in the treaty require unanimity, and we have made it abundantly clear that we are not prepared to countenance moves towards the supra-national structure that remains the aspiration of some of our partners.

Increasingly, the peoples of Europe—if not yet their Governments—are moving in a similar direction. We saw the way in which French opinion expressed itself during the referendum in France two or three years ago. There are similar developments in other countries. There is a historic process at work and a great debate throughout Europe. That debate may be slightly more voluble here than in some other countries, but it is already happening in France, Germany and elsewhere. It is our historic role to lead those who call for a Europe that is, as we have described it, a partnership of nations and not an incipient super-state. That will be our role and we shall continue to fight for that objective.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Is not the Government's strategy—if it can be dignified by that term—towards the IGC in danger of imminent collapse under the weight of its own internal contradictions? How can the Government achieve a Europe that is closer to European citizens when, even now, they are denying the European Parliament—the one elected representative of European citizens—the right of access to and representation at the IGC?

How will the Foreign Secretary square what he described in his statement as the Herculean task of structural and institutional reform that will be occasioned by enlargement, with the fact that incoming states will carry vetos, but there will be no logical extension of qualified majority voting? They will be allowed a veto, but not always a Commissionership. That seems utterly illogical.

Mr. Rifkind: On the latter point, I do not think that anyone is seriously suggesting—unless the Liberals are—that, if we have 27 member states, we must have 27 Commissioners, regardless of whether there is any work for them to do. That would be a typical Liberal solution to such a problem.

On the earlier part of his question, I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on the wisdom of what he has just said. We oppose the European Parliament playing a negotiating role in the intergovernmental conference, because the IGC is exactly what the letters mean—it is an intergovernmental conference. The European Parliament has never had such a role in the past, and Britain and France strongly opposed such a suggestion when it was discussed in recent weeks. The French Government share our view that it would be totally unacceptable in an intergovernmental conference for the European Parliament, which is just one of several institutions, to acquire such a role. Why should it have powers that national Parliaments, which have at least as much claim to democratic legitimacy—some would say more—will not have in the IGC?

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Does my right hon. and learned Friend recall that Chancellor Kohl, in his widely but partially reported speech at Louvain last month, said that no one wants a centralised super-state and that one does not and will not exist? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that that approach is entirely compatible with the Government's statement that they want a partnership of nations, which offers an encouraging way forward in developing a European Union that responds to the aspirations of this country and of our European partners?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of that welcome statement, which Chancellor Kohl has made on several occasions. We must examine particular proposals for changing the treaty or the institutions, as to whether they would move us in that direction. I entirely accept Chancellor Kohl's good faith in making that statement, and we welcome his repeated assertion of that view.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The House will want to study carefully the White Paper, which

[Mr. Peter Shore]

is important, but one's first impression is that its tone is right. I particularly welcome the emphasis on enlargement, subsidiarity, and the retention of powers by this Parliament and our own people. Following the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), I put it to the Secretary of State that the issue that worries the people of Europe more than any other, rising long-term unemployment, is not centrally on the IGC agenda. There is a connection between the level of unemployment and the existence of the commitment to economic and monetary union in the Maastricht treaty. It is precisely deflationary convergence factors that have driven unemployment up to 20 million. Surely that issue ought to be brought forward and put centrally on the IGC agenda.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his earlier comments, and I agree about the crucial importance of employment and jobs. The IGC is one of several, parallel negotiations that will be taking up the time of the European Union over the next two or three years. The IGC deals with specific treaty amendments and the powers of institutions. At the same time, negotiations will begin on enlargement, and there are the continuing questions of European monetary union and the EU's future financing.

Employment will be an important feature in all those negotiations. We do not believe that the IGC can itself make a significant contribution in that regard, because amending the treaty or the powers of institutions would not, in our view, make a significant contribution to real jobs. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the one major country in the European Union that has falling unemployment happens to be the one country—the United Kingdom—that has declined to introduce the social chapter. It is worth reflecting on that point.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Given that the European Court is demolishing our fishing industry and social chapter opt-out, will the Government consider stronger measures to assert the rights of this Parliament against the European Court, including modifying the 1972 legislation or asserting our parliamentary right to review European Court judgments—just as the German court does?

Mr. Rifkind: Of course, we are willing to consider any constructive proposal to ensure that the European Court does not frustrate the clear objectives of Governments when they introduce legislation. That has been one of the most worrying features of a number of judgments in the past few months. I do not pretend for a moment that the task is easy. One way of completing it, as I mentioned in my statement, is to seek to amend the treaty where appropriate.

Earlier, I said specifically that if health and safety legislation is, in our view, being misused to seek to impose the social chapter by the back door, and that requires a treaty amendment, we shall seek to achieve such an amendment in the intergovernmental conference. That applies in a number of other areas, including those that I mentioned. In addition, we must review the European Court's procedures, to limit wherever possible the means by which it can advance objectives that are inconsistent with those of the Governments who negotiated particular policy proposals.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): In view of the centrality of the deliberations of national Governments, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman stressed, how can—will he listen to me—how can a British Cabinet even contemplate a referendum on anything?

Mr. Rifkind: I hear the hon. Gentleman's views, and they are not relevant to the statement that I made today. As he well knows, the question of a referendum is under consideration, and I cannot usefully add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, although there will be a wide welcome for his support of the centrality of the nation state, the fact remains that the European Court of Justice, with its present powers, can exist only to serve as an engine for a federated super-state? It will not be enough merely to contain the extension of those powers. If we are to maintain the supremacy and the centrality of the nation state, we shall have to reduce the powers that the European Court has given itself.

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend that a serious challenge has to be addressed. On the one hand, we need a European Court to ensure, for example, that the single market is properly observed. Many would like to avoid their responsibilities under the single market, if they felt that they could get away with it, and the European Court has been extremely useful in preventing that. The European Court has also been very effective in a number of its judgments. For example, it fined Italy for avoiding milk quotas. We have been happy to welcome a number of such judgments.

At the same time, I agree with my hon. and learned Friend that we do not want a European Court that sees its role as making law—rather than interpreting the law that Governments have agreed—or that inadvertently makes law. That is a difficult problem and I do not say that we have the absolute answer, but it is an increasing priority that must be addressed, not just by the United Kingdom, but by the Council of Ministers as a whole.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that—quite apart from the effect of the convergence criteria for a single currency, which would probably cost millions of jobs in the Union—the right to tax, to borrow and to spend belongs, in a democracy, to the people through their representatives in Parliament, and no Government—Conservative, Labour or any other—have any moral or legal authority to transfer that power to others who are not accountable to the British electorate? Therefore, were such a proposal to come forward, it would be an attempted coup d'état to try to carry that through without the explicit consent of the British people in a vote on that issue in a referendum. That is a question that cannot be avoided, however long it is before the single currency becomes the immediate issue.

Mr. Rifkind: I very much agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the right to tax is one of the fundamental powers of a democratic and sovereign Parliament, and that

is one of the reasons why any fiscal proposal must have unanimity under the current rules and why, as I commented earlier, we would be gravely concerned at any attempt to use single market directives as a means of indirectly implementing or proposing fiscal measures. If a treaty consideration is also required to prevent such an eventuality, we would not hesitate to argue powerfully for such a change.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, whether one considers the question of Bosnia, the exchange rate mechanism, fishing, monetary union or a whole range of other matters, there is a clear sense in the electorates of Europe and the United Kingdom that the Maastricht treaty has failed the people of Europe? Does my right hon. and learned Friend also accept that the treaty amendments needed to make the changes to put that right, in the interests of Europe and the United Kingdom, require unanimity? How will he be able to achieve the objectives in the wish list that is set out in the White Paper except by renegotiating the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Rifkind: The proposals in the White Paper do not in themselves require a renegotiation of the Maastricht treaty; but I accept that some of them will be controversial. We may start off with few allies at the conference as regards some of the proposals. That does not alarm or depress me. I recall that when the Government identified the need for a British budget rebate, we started without any allies, but after robust negotiations we got what we believed to be our right. So if the merits of the argument are powerful and convincing, in due course we shall prevail.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): As the cost to the British economy of exchanges with mainland European currencies is now as great as, or even greater than, the cost of our contribution to the budget of the EU, has not the time come to give positive consideration to the case for a single European currency?

Mr. Rifkind: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. We believe that the proper time to consider the question of a single currency is not in this Parliament. There is no possibility of that before 1999, and the Government's view on the matter has in any case been presented clearly on previous occasions.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend that NATO is the bedrock of European security and defence. Given his welcome approach, does he agree that the future of the Western European Union is probably very good if it can at last become the proper pillar of NATO in the European context? Does he further agree that a takeover by the European Union, which he has resisted today, must be repelled at all costs?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree. I welcome my hon. Friend's support, particularly as he is fully involved in defence issues affecting the WEU. The crucial point is that co-operation between the WEU and the EU makes sense, but it must be co-operation, not subordination. The membership of the two bodies is different; they have different treaty bases. It would be quite improper for the EU to aspire to a defence role—that is not its function, nor should it become so.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it not true that, without the pressure of convergence, a number of our European partners would have found themselves in far greater financial trouble today—certainly on the inflation front?

Mr. Rifkind: If Governments choose to try to bring their inflation down—their public sector deficits down—that is highly desirable. If it happens throughout Europe in a rational and sensible way, the European economy can only benefit from that; but it must be done consistently with economic reality.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that his White Paper, which I know has not been easy to draft, sounds extremely positive? That seems to be recognised on both sides of the House, and it is welcome. Also welcome was his warning about the unending accumulation of powers by central authorities in the Union, and the need to hold them in check. But will he explain precisely how we shall put some substance into the drive for subsidiarity and the returning of powers to nation states? Has he seen a recent report that claims that, after two years of listing all the measures that ought to be returned to nation state level by subsidiarity, the only one that has in fact been returned is a directive on the management of zoos? That does not sound as if great progress has been made.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcoming opening remarks. The first step towards achieving what we all seek is to get entrenched in the treaty not only the principle of subsidiarity but, as we now propose, some of the detailed guidelines agreed at European summits. We know that whenever issues are in dispute, it is what is in the treaty that ultimately decides what the end product will be. So that is a high priority.

There has already been a welcome reduction in the number of new directives from Brussels, in part because of the completion of the single market process and in part because of the substantial difference in style of Mr. Santer, compared with the Commission headed by Jacques Delors. The trend in that respect is encouraging, but we have one heck of a long way to go. The more subsidiarity we can get entrenched in the treaty, the easier it will be to ensure that that is reflected in how the EU operates.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is not it time that some Minister or Opposition Front Bencher made it clear that political treaties do not last for ever, whether they are bilateral or multilateral? That will have to be faced at some time. We have had 23 years of this unmitigated disaster. We no longer use our own fishing fleets; the shipbuilding industry around Britain has been wrecked. Europeans never bought our coal and bought only very little of our steel. There are 20 million people out of work in Europe, and 4 million—the real figure—out of work here.

This has been a trail of disasters, and millions of people out there are longing for someone to admit that it has not worked. The halcyon days are over now. Neo-fascist parties are scattered all round Europe. Most Common

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

Market countries have different views on Bosnia, Croatia and the rest. It has to be admitted at some time. The emperor has no clothes, and all treaties eventually finish up in the political dustbin. That is where this will end.

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Rifkind: I am interested in hearing these wise philosophical statements. I noticed that they were addressed to both Front Benches. I do not know whether I speak on behalf of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) in any response that I make, but I ask the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to ponder on one thing. If the European Union has been as unremittingly bad as he implies, it is interesting that countries continue to queue up to join. At the moment, 12 countries are anxious to join the European Union. *[Interruption.]* There may be a variety of motives, but nevertheless the hon. Gentleman perhaps slightly exaggerated his point.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (South Thanet): May I welcome the parts of my right hon. and learned Friend's White Paper which, for the first time, seem to strike some good Euro-sceptic themes, such as the demands for new limits on Community action and new limits on the European Court of Justice, and, of course, the commitments to defend firmly our national opt-outs and our national veto? May I warn him, however, that if by any chance the important battles that he and his negotiating team will fight were to be lost or be surrendered by the revealingly new Europhile Labour Front Bench that we witnessed this afternoon, the House would, for the first time in many years, have to consider seriously the option of withdrawal?

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that an historic debate is taking place throughout Europe. I freely acknowledge that progress with the ideas that we represent is slow, but I believe that the partnership of nations that we envisage for the European Union goes with the grain not just of British opinion, but ultimately of that in other member states as well. I do not detect any enthusiasm in any country in Europe, outside, perhaps, certain elements of the political class, for some supra-national European nation state. I do not believe that there is any enthusiasm for that. If that is the case, given that these are all democratic nations, I believe that that will show itself in due course.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): That is a pipe dream. Is not the reality that the Foreign Secretary has said that he will negotiate changes to the European Court of Justice? He has said that he will robustly ask for this and for that. He is on a loser. Look at the position taken by the French and German Governments. A simple question: what will he do when his position is rejected, as inevitably it will be?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman may be able to put such a remark to his hon. Friends on his own Front Bench, who are terrified of being isolated, who have said that there will be no permanent opt-outs, and who wish to give up our veto in areas where we currently have it, but he is not entitled to make such a remark to the Government, who negotiated the British budget rebate, the opt-out from the social chapter, and the opt-out on the principle of a single currency. The hon. Gentleman should know that the Government's record in achieving targets that they set themselves has been exemplary.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that although it is necessary for us to support the enlargement of the Community, any such enlargement would involve as a prerequisite substantial and significant renegotiation of the finances of the Community and of the common agricultural policy? Does he further agree that there are some areas where the powers and resources of the Commission need to be increased, in particular the stamping out of fraud and the policing and elimination of illegal state subsidies?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, that is indeed a high priority, and we have attached importance to improving the controls against fraud both in previous initiatives and in some of the ideas in the White Paper. I also agree with my hon. Friend that, as we move towards enlargement, that enlargement will render essential what the Government have long argued for—a major reform of the common agricultural policy in order to remove some of its more irrational features.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the IGC will give the Government an opportunity to look again at their definition of the principle of subsidiarity? Does he accept that throughout most of Europe the principle of subsidiarity means that decisions are taken at three levels—the European level, the member state level and the national and regional level? Will he now answer the point put to him from the Labour Front Bench, that that should be the position adopted by the British Government at the IGC?

Mr. Rifkind: We believe very strongly in and have practised the policy of decentralising to individual people—giving people rights. The hon. Gentleman is obsessed by institutions and believes that freedom is extended when institutions are given powers. We believe that the best way of expanding liberty is to allow people to have greater control over their own lives.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): May I ask my right hon. and learned Friend two very quick questions? Will he clarify whether, as the White Paper suggests, we shall seriously challenge the Maastricht treaty and look for changes to it which would lead back to less pressure for federalism? Does he agree that a common currency—I ask him to be very explicit in his view—would lead to either increased interest rates or greater regional unemployment?

Mr. Rifkind: On the latter point, with regard to a single currency, that is obviously part of the current debate as to what the implications of a single currency would be. I shall not comment on that this afternoon. Those are issues that would need to be addressed before the Government could come to a judgment as to what the national interest might justify. However, with regard to any changes to the Maastricht treaty or to other parts of the acquis, we are very willing to argue robustly for changes wherever we believe that policies are being

implemented in a way contrary to that which the Council of Ministers intended when the proposals were originally approved.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Is not it the case that the Foreign Secretary said that British national interest would be the starting point in negotiations at the IGC? Why will he therefore not support the idea of extending majority voting in areas where there is a clear national interest, as in research and development?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not accept that that would be in the national interest. One of the most crucial questions is control of public expenditure, and there has often been a tendency in a majority of other countries to have a much laxer approach to increasing public expenditure, including in that area, than we believe appropriate. Therefore, I do not acknowledge the point that the hon. Gentleman is implying.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that there is a dilemma in people's minds on both sides of the House about the question of a referendum, in that those who defend the rights of this Parliament seem to be the ones who argue most vociferously for having a referendum, which would undercut those rights? Will he bear that in mind when approaching that subject?

Will my right hon. and learned Friend also bear in mind the help that we would gain as a nation from the extension of qualified majority voting to the reform of some of the areas of Community activity where we want to see reform, most particularly, perhaps, the common agricultural policy, to which he referred in his statement?

Mr. Rifkind: The reform of the common agricultural policy is already subject to qualified majority voting in every respect other than the guidelines of total expenditure. All the changes that we would wish to see can, almost without exception, be achieved under the existing arrangements of qualified majority voting in the CAP. The problem is getting the majority. That is itself a pretty difficult task, but it is not the system of voting that is the difficulty in this case.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): If the Foreign Secretary is serious about giving people control over their own lives, why will he not put the results of these negotiations to the British people in a referendum?

Mr. Rifkind: We do not yet know what the results of the negotiations will be. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said some time ago, we cannot contemplate how to present the results of the negotiations until we know whether they are minor, significant or substantial.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on making it plain that Britain does not want any further moves towards federalism in Europe, but may I suggest that that will not be enough for the British people and that, at some stage, we shall have to say no to one of the ludicrous laws that comes from Brussels, to disobey and thus demonstrate to the peoples of Europe that we must have a looser relationship through amendment of existing treaties?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend for his earlier comments. With regard to the latter part of his question, the appropriate way to ensure the protection of the national interest is to enter into negotiation on any changes that we believe to be necessary. Of course, negotiations are always difficult—they are difficult for other countries as well. The unanimity that is a protection for us is also a protection for them, but, in such a partnership, one needs to identify what is acceptable to each member state if the European Union is to prosper.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Do not the Foreign Secretary's comments about the European Court of Justice smack of sour grapes, especially after this morning's ruling on the working hours directive, which surely exposed the Government's dishonesty in attempting to suppress information from the Department of Health, which stated that working more than 48 hours a week doubles the risk of coronary heart disease and that it is a myth that working longer hours means working more productively? Did not the Government know that their case was fundamentally flawed when they brought it? Surely the answer should have been not to bring it in the first place.

Mr. Rifkind: If the requirement of a maximum of 48 hours were to apply to hon. Members and, in particular, to members of the Government, that would represent a remarkable change in our life style. Whether it would improve my health is not for me to comment on.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's espousal today of a vision of a Europe of sovereign nation states, and I note his comment that we have few allies. If negotiations do not make satisfactory progress from our point of view, is he prepared to veto the whole process?

Mr. Rifkind: This negotiation may run for a whole year, so I shall not speculate on what might happen at the end of that process, but we can prevent any proposals from other countries that we find unacceptable. There is an absolute requirement for unanimity. That sometimes works to our advantage and it might sometimes work to our disadvantage, but it ensures that no new proposals can be imposed on us without our agreement.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): In his statement, the Foreign Secretary said that the Government are approaching the IGC with confidence and determination. Why then do the Government so lack confidence in their Back Benchers that they have refused to table a motion that could be amended, for the debate on Thursday week? Is it because they know that they could not win such a vote? Is that not a sign of weakness and cowardice?

Mr. Rifkind: On the contrary; it has been the custom, in relation to all previous conferences of this sort, to provide an opportunity for the House to debate and to raise such issues at the beginning of the negotiation. When

[Mr. Rifkind]

conclusions were reached, the Government would of course require the support of the House if any were to be implemented.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In welcoming the publication of the White Paper and the broad thrust of the proposals—apart from the Foreign Office Euro-nonsense on page 3—should we not feel rather depressed, observing that the wording of this morning's decision by the Advocate General effectively means that the whole social chapter will be applied to Britain, despite the massive battle that the Government have put up? We give the Foreign Secretary our best wishes for his hard battle; does he agree that there is no way that he will bring any treaty to the House unless the European Court of Justice fundamentally changes its policies?

Mr. Rifkind: What we have today is an opinion by the Advocate General. We shall continue to argue our view to the Court, but as I said in my statement and in the White Paper, even if we are unsuccessful, we shall raise the matter, if necessary, in the IGC and seek the treaty or other changes that will be necessary, to ensure that the Council of Ministers' decisions are not rendered nugatory by an abuse of the procedure.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The White Paper will repay careful study. On a quick reading, however, one verb jumps from many a page: oppose, oppose, oppose. The trouble with the White Paper is that, rather than being a document of constructive Government engagement, it is a document for the Back Benchers of the Foreign Secretary's own party.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us whether Sir James Goldsmith will be consulted in connection with this document or future White Papers? He certainly seems to be determining Cabinet policy on the referendum at present.

Mr. Rifkind: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman read the document. He was good enough to acknowledge that he had not yet had a chance to do so—and, if I may say so, that was obvious from his question.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. and learned Friend will have noticed that many hon. Members have mentioned the European Court of Justice. Does he accept that the European Court has become the ratchet of centralisation, mostly because it legislates by reading what it believes to be the intentions of the legislators, rather than treaty-based documents? I urge my right hon. and learned Friend, at the forthcoming IGC, to get our partners to agree to exclude that possibility from future judgments; part of the problem will then be resolved.

Mr. Rifkind: I agree that good progress would be made if there were a requirement for strict interpretation of matters in the treaty or the directives. That would not eliminate, but would considerably reduce, the opportunity for the European Court to make law as opposed to interpreting it. That could only be in the public interest not just of this country, but of Europe as a whole.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The Foreign Secretary said that he wanted a flexible Europe, and also enlargement. Given that other European Union countries are hardly likely to agree to an enlargement to 27 states without moving towards qualified majority voting, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman's position mean either that he favours total inflexibility and immobility in the Union, or that he is really against enlargement?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman implies that we do not already have substantial qualified majority voting. He knows perfectly well that we do: that is the whole point. We have a substantial amount of qualified majority voting on the common agricultural policy, the single market and a number of other matters. We believe that that process has gone far enough, and we do not see any need to take it further because of enlargement. I reflect on the fact that NATO, with 15 members, has never had a vote in the past 50 years—it has never had a vote in its history—yet it has been able to function very effectively. I know that we are talking about a different organisation, but to some extent similar principles apply.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, over the centuries, Britain's time-honoured role has been to speak on behalf of the peoples of Europe and to protect them from the actions of patrician and arrogant elites—whether those elites incorporate kings, emperors, dictators or Commissioners? Does he also agree that it is honourable and not sceptical to oppose policies in Europe that would produce a slow but inevitable economic decline, and that it is honourable and not sceptical to oppose forces that would still like to bring about a European corporate state? I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the tone of his statement and the way in which he set out his objectives in that regard, but I ask him to consider seriously the points that have been made about the European Court of Justice. Britain is uniquely defenceless against its acts.

Mr. Rifkind: I agree that the European Court is a matter of increasing importance. I said in my statement that, in addition to the White Paper, we would publish a memorandum in the near future that would go into greater detail about what we believe ought to be achieved and ought to be negotiated with our partners. That demonstrates the priority that we attach to the subject.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We shall now move on to other business.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will hon. Members who have been standing for an hour without being called get favourable consideration the next time that the subject of the statement comes up?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that with a major statement, it is virtually impossible to call all hon. Members who are anxious to put questions. Questions went on for more than an hour. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am fully aware of the Members whom I have not been able to call. I have a complete list

of such Members from both sides of the House. I cannot give a commitment that they will be called the next time that the subject comes before us.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Just a moment; I have not finished. The hon. Gentleman has a lot to say; I have quite a lot to say, too. I cannot give a commitment that those Members will be called next week when we debate the subject, but I shall certainly do my best to ensure that they are recognised as often as I can. I know who has been standing today, how long the statement went on and the keenness with which Members wanted to question the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Banks: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During a ministerial statement, do you have to follow the convention of calling Privy Councillors, who all get called nearly every time that we have a statement? I understand that they take precedence in debates, but does that hold true for ministerial statements?

Madam Speaker: I called the hon. Gentleman twice out of the last three times that the Prime Minister made a statement on European affairs at the Dispatch Box. I have a list of the times that hon. Members are called. The hon. Gentleman does very well indeed at statements. If he would let me have a list of the Privy Councillors who have had privileges over him, I should be glad to receive it. I called two Opposition Privy Councillors. One of those I called first, the other by no means first, but way down the list. I am not clear about the Privy Councillors on the Government Benches. I tend to call some of them first, but by no means do they get priority during statements. They receive a little priority during debates, but certainly not for asking questions on statements.

Mr. Banks: How many were left standing?

Madam Speaker: I asked the hon. Gentleman to let me have a list of how many stood in the first place. I know how many there were; I doubt whether he does.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the Vehicle Excise Duty (Immobilisation, Removal and Disposal of Vehicles) Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 107) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Welfare of Broiler Chickens

4.36 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to protect the health and welfare of broiler chickens kept in indoor husbandry systems.

The UK chicken flock comprises two separate flocks. One is kept to lay eggs. Most of those birds are kept in battery cages and their welfare problems are relatively well known. In the other, much larger, flock, chickens known as broilers are reared for their meat.

In Britain, we rear over 700 million broiler chickens a year, yet they are the only one of the UK's major factory-farmed animals to have no specific laws to protect them. The Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 contain detailed provisions on pigs, calves and battery hens. On broiler chickens, however, the law is largely silent despite the severity of the health and welfare problems encountered by the birds.

The vast majority of broiler chickens are reared intensively indoors. They are kept in huge, windowless sheds that often hold up to 30,000 birds. The sheds are so overcrowded that, as the birds grow bigger, one can barely see the floors, so thickly are they carpeted with chickens. There are fears that the maximum stocking density recommended by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in its welfare code is frequently exceeded. To solve that problem, the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommended in its 1992 report on broilers that the maximum stocking density should be laid down in legal, binding regulations, rather than being left, as at present, to an unenforceable welfare code. To date, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has failed to act on that recommendation. No maximum stocking density is laid down by law. I hope that my Bill will remedy that omission.

The worst welfare problems, however, stem from the broiler industry's use of selective breeding methods and rich diets to get chickens to reach their slaughter weights in double-quick time. Today's broiler chickens have been bred to reach their slaughter weights in only six weeks. That is twice as fast as 30 years ago. It is the muscle that grows quickly—the part that is sold for meat. However, their legs fail to keep pace and cannot properly support the overgrown body. As a result, each year millions of chickens suffer from painful, sometimes crippling, leg disorders.

Academic research, which assessed the walking ability of broilers, suggests that as many as 180 million chickens a year are suffering from those painful problems. Indeed, the Farm Animal Welfare Council's working group found leg problems of varying degrees of severity on almost every farm that it visited. In the worst cases, chickens are incapable of sustained walking and can move only with the help of their wings or by crawling on their shanks.

Professor John Webster, head of the veterinary school at the university of Bristol, describes those broilers as suffering from a long list of painful bone and joint disorders. He adds that the chronic pain suffered by many of them

"must constitute the single most extreme example of man's inhumanity to another sentient creature".

Hon. Members should know that broiler chickens reared in Britain are growing too fast not only for their legs, but for their hearts and lungs. Many birds develop

[Mr. Alan Meale]

congestive heart failure, which causes ascites—a pooling of body fluids in the abdomen. About 7 million broilers die of ascites each year before reaching their slaughter age of six weeks.

Professor Webster also said:

"It is absolutely not right that animals in the first weeks of their life should be experiencing heart disease; it is absolutely not right that animals in the first weeks of their life should be crippled."

That is something with which I agree wholeheartedly.

A significant number of broilers suffer from painful breast blisters, ulcerated feet and hock burns. Those injuries arise because, owing to leg weakness, many birds spend long periods squatting down on the litter. That is often contaminated with droppings and prolonged contact with it can lead to the injuries to which I have referred. Wood shavings are the material most commonly used as litter in broiler sheds. After two or three weeks, however, often there are hardly any wood shavings left; what remains is largely solid poultry manure. Improved litter management is a key factor in reducing the incidence of breast blisters, ulcerated feet and hock burns. My Bill includes a requirement that litter is kept clean and dry.

Regular inspections are essential if acceptable standards of broiler health and welfare are to be achieved. Indeed, the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommended that a law should be brought in requiring all flocks to be inspected twice a day. My Bill includes such a requirement. I fear that, at present, the absence of adequate inspections means that many diseased, injured or dying birds are not being identified as such and, as a result, are given no appropriate attention or treatment.

So extreme are the health problems of today's chicken broilers that if, instead of being slaughtered at six weeks, they were allowed to live on, 80 per cent. would die before reaching the age of puberty at 18 weeks. That presents a massive problem to one particular sector of the broiler industry. The broiler breeders—the birds whose role it is to produce the subsequent generations—must remain fit and healthy into adulthood so that they can breed. If fed normally many would, as I have said, die before reaching puberty. Those that survive would suffer from reduced fertility.

To address those problems, the parent stock—the breeders—are fed on restricted rations to slow down their growth rate. One study found that broiler breeders ate only a quarter to a half of what they would have eaten if given free access to food. The researchers concluded that restricted-fed broiler breeders are

"chronically hungry, frustrated and stressed."

There can be no justification for keeping birds in a state of constant hunger. My Bill requires broilers to be given sufficient food to prevent hunger.

Further problems arise during what the industry calls harvesting, which is when the birds are removed from the sheds and packed into crates ready for the journey to the slaughterhouse. Teams of catchers depopulate the sheds at great speed, carrying four or even more chickens in each hand. The birds are held by just one leg, with rough handling being commonplace. The extent of the brutality involved in the catching process was highlighted in a Bristol university study that examined the cause of death in broilers that were dead on arrival at the slaughterhouse. Just over half had died from heart failure. The researchers presumed that, for those birds, the stress of catching, loading and transporting had been simply too much for them to cope with. Some 35 per cent. had died from traumatic injuries, with a dislocated hip being the most common injury. That was associated with profuse haemorrhaging and in about one third of the cases the femur—a major bone—had actually been forced into the chicken's abdominal cavity. The researchers suggested that catching and carrying large birds by one leg is conducive to dislocation of the hip. Clearly, the catching process is not just stressful and frightening for the chickens, but in many cases leads to injury and even death. My Bill requires catching to be carried out in such a manner as to avoid injury to the birds.

I believe that if people knew of the suffering experienced by broiler chickens in Britain there would be a public outcry no less strong than that occasioned by the export of calves. Urgent reforms are needed to deal with the very serious health and welfare problems experienced by chicken broilers. My Bill would require the broiler industry in Britain to take a much more responsible approach in the rearing of its chickens. I hope that, one day, the Bill will stand as a benchmark for this House and for the remainder of Europe.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Tony Banks, Sir Richard Body, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Bill Etherington, Sir Andrew Bowden, Mr. Eric Martlew, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Eric Clarke, Mr. Gary Waller, Mr. Terry Lewis and Mr. Don Dixon.

Welfare of Broiler Chickens

Mr. Alan Meale accordingly presented a Bill to protect the health and welfare of broiler chickens kept in indoor husbandry systems: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 22 March and to be printed. [Bill 83.]

Orders of the Day

CONSOLIDATED FUND (NO. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

National Health Service (Residual Liabilities) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I must inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The question before the House this afternoon is extremely simple—whether the national health service should pay its debts. Until three months ago, I assumed that there was no doubt about that, not only in my mind but in anyone else's mind. It seemed to me inconceivable that anyone could believe that a public sector national health service should be expected to or have the freedom to walk away from its debts.

Still more unthinkable in my mind, until a few weeks ago, was any suggestion that the Opposition would think it desirable policy to advocate the proposition that the NHS should walk away from its debts—but that, apparently, is the argument that the House will hear in the debate this afternoon. I look forward to hearing that argument advanced because I am absolutely confident not only that it is one with which I shall not agree, but that no one outside this House will agree that the NHS should be free to walk away from its debts.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Does that mean that the Secretary of State will have a say in what those debts are? Or will it be a case of, "You borrow as much as you like and I, Secretary of State, will pick up the tab"?

Mr. Dorrell: That is an absurd proposition. As I shall show, controls have been, are and will remain in place to limit the borrowings of NHS trusts. They are unaffected by the Bill, which deals with a very simple question—whether NHS bodies should meet their liabilities.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. Friend share my astonishment that the Labour party dares to talk about paying debts? When the Labour party was in office, national health service hospitals never paid their debts on time and inflation was as high as 27 per cent.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is entirely right: in the late 1970s I was a business man and NHS bodies were among the customers that I supplied. In those days, the NHS was famous for paying its debts late—but that situation has improved dramatically in recent years.

The question before the House is whether the public sector, particularly the NHS, should pay its debts. Until a few days ago, I had understood that it was Labour's position that the public sector should pay its debts—it did not occur to me that there was a distinction between the two Front Benches on this proposition. I thought that the Labour party believed that the NHS was a key part of the public sector and that it believed that the public sector, including the national health service, should pay its debts.

[Mr. Dorrell]

I thought that the Labour party was opposed to the proposition that the national health service should be a privatised institution.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I share my right hon. Friend's astonishment and dismay at the perceived attitude of the Opposition.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): You have not even heard it yet.

Mr. Dykes: I am referring to what we have seen so far in relation to the Opposition's reaction to the Bill. Is it not more ominous than that? I thank my right hon. Friend for introducing this crucial Bill. I declare an indirect interest in that I have a constituent who has a company that is involved in helping with these matters. Is not the danger of the Labour party's destructive attitude, which is ominous, in opposing the Bill—I hope that it passes—that it will stop some crucial transactions from going ahead which would help the public in terms of new hospital developments? That will be directly the fault—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made a long intervention. I would like a bit of order from the Government Front Bench and from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) for raising that point and he is entirely right. If the Labour party sustains the view that it is reported to have taken in this morning's *Financial Times* on the tapes earlier today—that the NHS should be free to walk away from its debts—private finance initiative partners will not see the NHS as a credit-worthy borrower under a Labour Government and all its trading relationships will be affected. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) reminded hon. Members, that would be a return to the payment record of the NHS when the Labour party was in power.

I have introduced the Bill because approximately three months ago it was pointed out to me that there is a weakness in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990—

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): Why did you not know?

Mr. Dorrell: Because I do not know the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 off by heart—and I presume that the hon. Gentleman does not either. It was pointed out to me that schedule 2, paragraph 30, of the Act—which is at the forefront of the hon. Gentleman's mind; he knows every detail of every schedule of the Act—contains the following provision:

"If an NHS trust is dissolved under this Part of this Schedule, the Secretary of State may by order transfer—

Ms Harman: I know.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady may know, but other hon. Members probably have not memorised this schedule. It continues:

"or provide for the transfer to—

(a) the Secretary of State, or

(b) the health authority, or

(c) another NHS trust,

of such of the property, rights and liabilities of the NHS trust which is dissolved".

In other words, I have the power to deal with the liabilities of an NHS trust—I do not have the duty to deal with the liabilities of an NHS trust that is to be dissolved. That was the provision contained in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and in case any hon. Member thinks that this is an oversight associated specifically with that Act, it is worth referring to the fact that the National Health Service Act 1977 contained an even more general proposition, which is that an order of this kind may contain

"such provisions for the transfer of officers, property, rights and liabilities as the Secretary of State thinks fit".

In other words, the door is left completely open—particularly in relation to the reorganisation of a trust—for the Secretary of State to reorganise the trust and to make no provision for the liabilities of that trust. That seems to me to be a wholly unsatisfactory basis on which to expect people to trade with NHS trusts.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose—*

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way in a moment. It is unsatisfactory for people engaging in long-term investments to support a trading relationship with an NHS trust. As I said to the Treasury Select Committee a few days ago, it is equally unsatisfactory from the point of view of the potato supplier to the hospital. Whatever the basis of the trading relationship, it is completely unsatisfactory that traders dealing with trusts should face a position where the Secretary of State has the power to reorganise the trust without making any provision for the liabilities of the trust.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I understand the point that the Secretary of State has made and I also understand the original Act. If national health service trusts have to submit their accounts every year—and they are looked at by the regional office, by the executive or the Secretary of State—and if all capital projects have to go through the accounting officer procedure and be approved, what are the circumstances in which the Secretary of State envisages that a trust would be in such a position that it would be at the risk of ending its life by the writ of the Secretary of State with a great amount of debt yet to be paid? If that were to happen, why would it not be dealt with in the normal way—by an insurance policy that ensures that the debts will be met?

Mr. Dorrell: I followed the point made by the hon. Gentleman until his last phrase. The answer to the first part of his question is that I can conceive of no circumstance where it would be in the public interest for me to use the discretion that is left to me in the legislation, and that is why I am in favour of removing it. The hon. Gentleman asked why a trader cannot insure against the possibility that I might use that discretion. Surely the

answer is that it would be absurd for the public sector to pay, through a trading relationship with a trader, to insure against a risk of the Secretary of State doing something that he has not got the slightest intention of ever doing. It would be much cheaper and much cleaner to remove a discretion that I have made it abundantly clear that I have not the slightest intention of ever using.

Mr. Hughes: I understand what the Secretary of State is saying. He concedes that one way of dealing with it is that there is an insurance that covers the risk of any arm of the NHS being in a position where it could not meet its debts—I was not talking about the insurance of the trader with the NHS, but about NHS bodies, such as the trust. That is one way of doing it, but the Secretary of State is saying that he would rather not do it that way but would rather legislate so that it is on the face of an Act.

Mr. Dorrell: That is exactly the position: I can conceive of no circumstance in which it would be legitimate for a Secretary of State to use the discretion. Therefore, I am in favour of removing the discretion—and that is the sole purpose of the Bill. As soon as I was told about the position in the existing legislation, I decided to remedy it. I have no doubt whatsoever about the public's view of this issue: they regard the national health service as their health service; they believe that the national health service should meet its obligations, just as the overwhelming majority of our fellow countrymen believe that they have a duty to meet their obligations; and they would be outraged at the proposition that I should come to the Dispatch Box and defend the right of the NHS to do a moonlight flit on its liabilities.

That is the case that the Labour party is reduced to making in this debate. It is reduced to defending the right of any Secretary of State for Health to walk away knowingly from the liabilities properly entered into by the national health service. It is no good the hon. Member for Peckham saying that that is not true, because that will be the result of voting against the Bill.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way—he has made the same point about eight times and at different levels of volume. As the National Health Service Act 1977 contained a similar provision, why have these problems been created so suddenly?

Mr. Dorrell: I have made no secret of the answer to that question, which is that the issue has not previously arisen. If the inadequacy of the present provision had been drawn to the attention of any of my Conservative or Labour predecessors, they would have tackled it as I am tackling it. *[Interruption.]* I have answered the question—because it was pointed out to me. *[Laughter.]* It seems to me that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair is finding great difficulty in following the debate. He cannot hear what the Secretary of State is saying.

Mr. Dorrell: It is not difficult to defend the proposition that if someone says to a Secretary of State in charge of a major public service that the condition of the current law is unsatisfactory—and I consider the condition of the current law and find it unsatisfactory—I should place the unsatisfactory provision before the House, as I have done, and ask the House to remedy its unsatisfactory nature.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The Secretary of State said several times:

"It was pointed out to me".

Who pointed it out to him? Was it the banks, who were failing to support PFI schemes? Is that why this legislation is being rushed through the House tonight?

Mr. Dorrell: We have legislation that is brought before the House in the usual course of events to remedy something that is unsatisfactory in the present state of the law. The Opposition ask who pointed it out. It was the people with whom we are negotiating about the private finance initiative. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] The House expresses surprise. If the House had read the evidence that I gave to the Treasury Select Committee a fortnight ago, it would have found that I have never made a secret of the fact that those people raised the matter. It does not seem to me to matter who raised it. What matters—

Mr. Gunnell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dorrell: Not at the moment, because I am answering the previous intervention.

What matters is the simple question, should the NHS preserve its current discretion to walk away from liabilities properly entered into? That is the only question in the Bill that the House must decide. If Opposition Members walk through the No Lobby later, they will be voting for the NHS to walk away from liabilities properly entered into by the management structure established by the House and charged with managing the national health service.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): The Secretary of State has just admitted that there are no conceivable circumstances in which the Secretary of State and the NHS would walk away from liabilities. Why, therefore, did those individuals or groups of individuals draw that problem to the attention of the Secretary of State? Did they not believe the Secretary of State about that?

Mr. Dorrell: Perhaps they have heard the utterings of Opposition Members and are worried that Labour Members might at a time far in the future walk away from the liabilities of the health service. In those circumstances, potential traders are entitled to the assurance that the NHS will not exploit a freedom to do a moonlight flit. It is the type of behaviour that, when undertaken by directors of bankrupt shyster companies, leads to those directors being revealed on television by Esther Rantzen and her like. To argue as a specific proposition that people should be free to walk away from a liability entered into legitimately, is an activity associated with shyster, second-rate lawyers. I am amazed that the Labour party and Labour Front Benchers should want to have anything to do with such behaviour.

Mr. Gunnell: Would it not be fair to say that the Secretary of State has been told that none of the contracts for those private sector initiatives can be signed because the clause is not in place?

Mr. Dorrell: It is certainly not true that no PFI projects can go ahead because of the absence of the clause.

Mr. Gunnell: Signed.

Mr. Dorrell: Signed, go ahead—I accept the amendment. I can say that with total confidence because 48 schemes, costing a total of £225 million, in the NHS private finance initiative have already gone ahead.

Mr. Spellar: How many are held up?

Mr. Dorrell: Because they are in the national health service, they are all health-related schemes. We are negotiating with partners the details of arrangements that have already been announced, and later I shall talk about the others that are still being assessed. We are negotiating with partners the terms on which those contracts will go ahead. The inadequacy of the law was revealed in the context of those discussions, and it seems to me straightforward that the House should remedy a weakness in the law.

I have absolutely no doubt that the public view of that question would be that the NHS should pay its debts. That is the question that the hon. Member for Peckham must answer. The Bill does not change the powers and duties of trusts, which are set out clearly in the legislation. Schedule 2, paragraph 6 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 says:

"An NHS trust shall carried out effectively, efficiently and economically the functions for the time being conferred on it".

The financial control regime of trusts places three clear financial obligations on trusts—to break even taking one year with another, to stay within the external financing limit of the trust and to deliver a 6 per cent. return on average relevant net assets.

Ms Harman: Where is the statute?

Mr. Dorrell: It is in section 10(2) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Section 10(1) of the 1990 Act imposes an explicit obligation that every trust

"shall ensure that its revenue is not less than sufficient, taking one financial year with another, to meet outgoings properly chargeable to revenue account."

That is one of the three financial obligations of the trusts. The other two were set out clearly in the financial control regime.

I give the hon. Lady an undertaking. If she can produce any demonstrable example of trusts borrowing irresponsibly and using their power to borrow in a way that does not match the external financing limit controls and the requirement to operate effectively, efficiently and economically within the 1990 Act, I will use the power set out in section 10(2) that allows me to define that as a statutory obligation. At the moment, there appears to be no problem for me to tackle on the issue that the hon. Lady has raised. In those circumstances it would be, to put it mildly, an absurd over-reaction to a debating point that the hon. Lady likes making, for me to use a statutory power that has not been demonstrated to be necessary. The answer to the question, "Where is the power if it is necessary?" is on the face of the 1990 Act.

Ms Harman: First, does the Secretary of State agree that he cannot use his powers under section 10 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 to restrict the rights that trusts have under schedule 3 of that Act to borrow without his approval?

Secondly, does the Secretary of State agree that the reason why trusts have not borrowed from the private sector hitherto, despite the fact that they have had the power to do so since 1990, is that they have been unable to provide security for those loans because they have been unable to mortgage their assets? The Bill provides that security, and that is why the trusts will start borrowing.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady is wrong on both points.

First, section 10(2) of the 1990 Act says:

"It shall be the duty of every NHS trust to achieve such financial objectives as may from time to time be set by the Secretary of State with the consent of the Treasury".

That is a clear power, which I could use to give EFLs the statutory backing if it were demonstrated to be necessary. The hon. Lady must demonstrate that it is necessary, and she has not done so.

Secondly, the answer to the question, does the Bill provide a basis of guarantee or allow a lender to a trust access to the assets of the trust, is no, it does not; and the bar on the pledging of assets of trusts remains in place because it is in the statute.

I have answered both questions the hon. Lady asked me directly and in the negative. They are irrelevant to the key question that the House must address today, which is not whether the controls are adequate—although I should be very happy to debate that. If the House wants to demonstrate the need for extra controls on NHS trusts, it must be demonstrated that existing controls are inadequate. The hon. Member for Peckham has not done that. Whether the controls are adequate or inadequate does not alter the fact that I believe that NHS trusts and the NHS as an institution should meet the financial obligations that it properly takes on. That is the Bill's only effect.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Secretary of State has, as yet, left two questions unanswered. The hon. Member for Peckham asked whether he agrees that it is open to trusts to borrow without his approval. The second question, which has not yet been asked, is why the original power in the 1990 Act is a power of discretion—either to pick up the tab or not to pick it up? What reasons was the Secretary of State given by his civil servants for the fact that the Bill, as originally drafted, gave him a discretion that is no longer thought to be appropriate?

Mr. Dorrell: The answer to the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question—I have asked that question myself—rests on the proposition that the same principle was carried forward from the 1977 Act. There are currently not many people advising me on the drafting of the legislation who remember the precise arguments that went on nearly 20 years ago. I have no intention of ever using that discretion, as I have already made clear to the House, which is why I am in favour of getting rid of it.

On the question about the nature of controls on trust borrowing, that is set out in the financial regime of trust financial control. If it were shown that the regime was in some sense flawed and that trusts were not living within the controls set out in this document, I would be the first to argue—as one would expect of a former Treasury Minister—that we need to take effective action to ensure that trusts live within their financial obligations.

Trusts can borrow without my specific consent, but they must first show that they are borrowing in a way in which good value is delivered. The overwhelming scale of trust borrowings—*[Interruption.]* They do because they have a statutory obligation, which I have read out to the House, to trade in an effective, efficient and economical manner. A trust that borrows expensively when a cheap alternative is available would very quickly and quite properly find itself before the Public Accounts Committee, with its accountable officer sitting beside Mr. Alan Langlands, the accounting officer for the NHS, explaining why it was borrowing expensive money when cheap money was available in the public sector.

The hon. Member for Peckham, however much she may throw up dust and fog around this issue, has failed to obscure the central question of whether the NHS will stand by its liabilities. That is the only question that the House is being asked to decide today. I assure the House that if the trust financial regime is shown to deliver inadequate control on trusts, we shall of course address that inadequacy. I have given that assurance three times now. She has not, however, shown that the trust financial regime is inadequate.

The hon. Lady has spoken to many people on this subject, and I look forward to hearing what she has to say in the debate. If she plans to argue that we need extra controls on trusts' financial obligations, she will have to demonstrate that they are not staying within the existing financial regime, which provides all the controls that could possibly be required.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The issue of the trusts is central to the Secretary of State's argument. He has raised the issue of the trust walking away from its responsibilities. As all trusts are approved by the Secretary of State and are responsible to him, will he tell us how a trust will be able to walk away from its liabilities?

Mr. Dorrell: The Bill's purpose is to provide that trusts and the NHS as a body cannot walk away from their liabilities. I do not think that a public sector body should have that freedom, which is why I am proposing to withdraw from the Secretary of State the discretion in the current law to reorganise a trust without providing for its liabilities.

The answer to how much a trust can borrow is the amount set out in its external financing limit.

Ms Harman: It is £5 billion.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady says that the amount that trusts can borrow is £5 billion. That is perfectly true. The amount that one trust can borrow is set out in its EFL, or in the amount that is provided for in the figure underlying its EFL.

The Bill does not change any of those controls, and no evidence has been produced to suggest that the controls are inadequate. As has already been revealed in this debate, the fact is that the Bill changes—*[Laughter.]* It changes nothing, because I have not the slightest intention of using the discretion that it removes. Therefore, the Bill will have no practical consequence—unless one believes that the members of a successor Government want to protect for themselves the freedom to walk away from NHS liabilities that have been properly entered into. That is the Bill's only effect and it introduces only that change. It changes nothing unless one believes that a successor Government want the freedom to walk away from NHS liabilities.

The proposals in the Bill cannot be answered by talk about the approvals process, as that would be a red herring. I am quite happy to defend the approvals process, but that is not the question before the House. The question is whether a debt, once entered into by the NHS, should be paid. If we believe that the answer to that question is yes, we should vote in the Aye Lobby at the conclusion of the debate. If we believe that the answer is no—

Mr. Spellar: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: I shall give way in a moment. I have plenty more to say; I am not finished yet.

If the answer to that question is no, we are entering a quite extraordinary world, in which the first element will be a completely new definition of stakeholding. Opposition Front Benchers are now defining for us their belief that, should someone be a creditor of the NHS under Labour, he will no doubt hold a stake in it, but he cannot be sure of being paid. He would be given a piece of paper that was of as much value as a voucher issued by the Tsarist railway system. Opposition Front Benchers want to retain the freedom to walk away—*[Interruption.]* I am absolutely on my place. They want to retain the freedom to walk away from liabilities, in the manner of a tinpot third-world country, which is exactly the type of behaviour we condemn when it is unearthed in the darker fringes of the corporate sector by investigative journalists.

I should have thought that Opposition Front Benchers would want nothing whatever to do with such a practice. That is the type of shyster trick beloved of smart Aleck lawyers, who pay attention to the small print without recognising the liability that every taxpayer who pays for the NHS wants us properly to respect. Nye Bevan must be turning in his grave at the way in which Opposition Front Benchers are demeaning the name of the service that he established. They want to preserve for themselves the freedom that they condemn in the dark fringes of the corporate sector.

Mr. Spellar *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I have excited the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), and I give way to him.

Mr. Spellar: The Secretary of State has been slightly confusing. Stripping away all the rhetoric, he has given a very interesting redefinition of risk management and risk assessment in the health service and under the PFI. Is he saying that the PFI will be reckoned as guaranteed by the

[Mr. Spellar]

Department of Health, with no risk to the private sector? How does that affect its relationship to the public sector borrowing requirement?

Mr. Dorrell: I am saying no such thing. All that I am doing is removing from a private sector trader dealing with the health service—whether a PFI partner or the famous potato dealer—the risk that a Secretary of State might walk away from a properly defined liability on the health service. The whole point of the PFI—which I shall address later and which I am sure that the hon. Member for Peckham will want to touch on in her speech—is that it defines a series of risks that do not rest on the health service or the public sector and are therefore not liabilities of the public sector which are dealt with in the Bill. Those risks are taken by the private sector partner—that is the point of the PFI.

The purpose of the Bill is not to address those liabilities and risks, but to address the relationship between every NHS trust and every supplier of goods and services to that trust, such as the PFI contractor and the potato supplier. My belief—I am sure that it is held by all my hon. Friends—is that the NHS should honour its obligations to those people while understanding that they have taken on properly assessed commercial risks in the establishment of that trading relationship with the health service.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I must make progress.

I said that Nye Bevan must be turning in his grave at the prospect of the NHS being dealt with in that way. I notice that other, more contemporary people, do not associate themselves with the tactics of the hon. Member for Peckham. The hon. Lady has tabled a reasoned amendment to the Bill, which she believes is exclusively related to the PFI—I do not deny the Bill's relevance to the PFI, but it extends far beyond it. The hon. Lady believes that the Bill relates only to the PFI; I therefore find it passing strange that not one member of the shadow Front-Bench Treasury team was prepared to put his or her name to the reasoned amendment tabled by the hon. Lady.

The shadow Chancellor, the shadow Chief Secretary and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) have all been visiting potential PFI partners and trying to sound orthodox. They have been trying to underwrite Labour's respectability in that community. Members of the shadow Front-Bench Treasury team who are touring that circuit will find their hosts choking on their prawn cocktails when they explain to them that they want to preserve the freedom to walk away from private finance liabilities.

The hon. Member for Peckham must answer another question in the context of the debate. She does not merely have to explain why the shadow Treasury Front-Bench team wants nothing to do with the reasoned amendment, but whether she has yet resolved her difficulties with her colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench about their attitude to the PFI. It is not only every potential PFI partner, but everyone working in the health service and every voter who want some clear answers.

Ms Harman: I shall give them.

Mr. Dorrell: I look forward to that as it will be a first.

I shall remind the hon. Lady of where she is coming from in terms of the obscurity of Labour's position on the PFI. On the "Today" programme on 28 November the hon. Lady said that the PFI was

"a new trick to privatise the Health Service."

That was the hon. Lady's line, and it was not just a slip of the tongue. We both attended a public meeting in Birmingham town hall at the beginning of this year and, with my own ears, I heard her say:

"I don't call it a Private Finance Initiative, I call it a privatisation initiative."

The hon. Lady has twice taken that line—she was explicit and specific: she is against the PFI.

The hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) used to be a member of Labour's Front-Bench team. She made it clear that the hon. Member for Peckham was not the only one to hold that view. The hon. Member for Dulwich said:

"The Private Finance Initiative is the Tories' route map to the privatisation of the Health Service."

Those views are entirely wrong, but, more interestingly in the context of today's debate, they reveal the position of the shadow health team on the PFI: its members are explicitly and clearly against it.

The hon. Member for Peckham says that the Bill is all to do with the PFI and I am responding to her concerns about that. If the Bill is all about the PFI, the House, in order to consider the Bill, needs to know where the hon. Lady stands on the PFI. We need to hear the hon. Member for Peckham reconcile her position with that of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron).

While the hon. Member for Peckham says that she is against the PFI and calls it the privatisation initiative, the hon. Member for Rother Valley told the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry in January:

"We do not disagree with the PFI, how could we? It was Labour who first thought of partnerships between the public and private sector."

The hon. Lady says that she is against the PFI; the hon. Member for Rother Valley says that he is in favour of it and that it would be inconceivable for the Labour party to oppose it.

At least the hon. Member for Rother Valley has the leader of the Labour party on his side. The leader of the Labour party was explicit about the PFI and health when he said at the party's conference in 1994—

Mr. Milburn: We have heard this old story before.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman says that it was a long time ago—it was 17 months ago. Are we to believe that the Labour party has changed its position on the subject in 17 months? Are we to believe that the leader of the Labour party goes to his party conference and sets out his stall and, 17 months later, a member of the Labour party's Front-Bench team says, "That was all 17 months ago"?

Seventeen months ago the leader of the Labour party said:

"We would get public and private finance working together in transport, in housing, in capital projects in health and education."

Ms Harman: Yes.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady says yes—public and private finance will work together in health and education.

I look forward to hearing the hon. Lady explain to the House how she anticipates getting public and private finance to work together while defending the proposition that the NHS must be free to walk away from its debts. Those propositions make strange bedfellows and I look forward to hearing the hon. Lady's explanation.

As well as making that statement at the Labour party conference, in the Budget debate in the autumn of 1995, the leader of the Labour party was once again explicit when he said:

"The PFI is right in principle."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1077.]

We need the Opposition Front-Bench team to tell us their policy on the PFI in the health service. Does the Labour party believe that it is a privatisation initiative? If it does and it can demonstrate that, I imagine that most hon. Members would make common cause against it. It is because I do not believe that it is a privatisation initiative, but believe that it reinforces the delivery of high quality public health, that I am a strong supporter of the PFI. In that, I enjoy the support of the hon. Member for Rother Valley and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), but I do not enjoy the support of the holder of the shadow health brief, the hon. Member for Peckham. I look forward to hearing how the hon. Lady reconciles those positions.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Does my right hon. Friend realise that my constituents do not consider the PFI as a privatisation initiative, but see it as a massive opportunity for a new district general hospital? The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) does not have the support of Gravesham Labour party, which has been deafening in its silence on the subject because it supports the PFI as a great hope for the future.

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who speaks for his own constituents, who rightly see the PFI as the best way of delivering—not just to his constituents—more than 25 other big projects in the health service. They are currently being assessed and some of them have already been approved—25 projects costing £25 million or more are all going ahead under the PFI. Three of them have been given the go-ahead already. At Budget time I announced that we were taking the PFI up a gear and would be assessing all the projects coming through the system. I anticipated that the go-ahead for those projects would be announced at the rate of about one a month. That was three months ago and so far we have approved three projects. I regard that as delivering almost precisely on the prediction that I gave at the time of the Budget.

Mr. Martlew: About 18 months ago the second stage of the Cumberland infirmary in my constituency was ready to go to tender, but it was stopped because of the private finance initiative. My constituents are suffering as a result of the PFI, which is simply a delaying tactic designed to save the Government some money.

Mr. Dorrell: Anyone who believes that the PFI—which offers the possibility of investing in health service capital stock without any need for Treasury authorisation or queuing for rationed capital within the context of conventional public sector capital planning processes—is a delaying tactic with regard to NHS capital investment is living in a different world from the one in which I have lived all my adult life. The hon. Gentleman knows that the project in his constituency is being assessed, together with 25 others. He knows also that the Government have increased publicly funded capital investment in the health service by nearly 70 per cent. in real terms, whereas Labour cut it by 30 per cent.

Despite the increased pace of capital investment in the health service, 10 big projects have gone ahead in the past 10 years—that is roughly one a year. Since the programme was launched on a higher plane at the time of the last Budget, we have been announcing projects at a rate of one a month. Exchanging a system that approved projects at the rate of one a year for a system that is currently approving them at the rate of one per month seems a significant improvement—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are far too many sedentary interventions—not least from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Dorrell: To move from one project a year to one a month is, by anyone's definition, a significant increase in the health service's capital investment programme.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Name them.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall name three schemes for which I have announced the go-ahead: the South Buckinghamshire NHS trust, St. James's in Leeds and the Royal Berkshire and Battle hospitals NHS trust. They have received the go-ahead since the Budget.

Mr. Gunnell: Will the Secretary of State make it clear that, in talking about the "go-ahead", he is referring to a go-ahead on the planning stage? Does he concede that the contract has not been signed in Leeds? We are led to believe that it will be the first contract signed, which means that the initiative has not yet provided anything on the ground: all the projects are still at the planning stage.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is wrong about the initiative's not having provided anything on the ground. I have referred to 48 smaller schemes and £225 million which has been provided under the private finance initiative. It is true that none of the three big schemes that I announced since the Budget has been signed. At the time, I would have been amazed to hear that the contracts would be signed within three months. It is an absurd idea that one can sign the contract for a £38 million or £40 million scheme—sketch it out on the back of an envelope and sign all the documentation—within a week. Anyone who believes that has never met a lawyer.

Labour Members live in a totally surreal world. We announced the go-ahead for one scheme in December and for the other two in January. It is totally absurd to suggest that I should come to the House with a great pile of contractual documents six weeks after the announcement of intent.

If the House is to address the issue seriously this afternoon, it must recognise that the health service faces a huge task in ensuring that it puts in place all the capital stock that can be used to deliver high-quality health care into the next century. The Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron)

[Mr. Dorrell]

recognise that fact, but apparently the hon. Member for Peckham does not. Today she has the opportunity to emerge from the shadows and to make two things clear to the House and to the country: first, that she believes that the NHS should pay its debts; and, secondly, that she favours the kind of public-private partnership that has been espoused by her hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley and by her right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and which is being carried forward by the Government. The time has come for her to respond to those two simple points.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know whether it is the fault of the amplifying system or the Secretary of State, but we should not have to listen to his shouting in future debates. It is a serious point: whatever the merits of his argument, the Secretary of State shouted at us for almost 50 minutes. Perhaps the amplifier volume could be turned down so that we are not blasted out of the Chamber.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a serious point of order.

5.35 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the National Health Service (Residual Liabilities) Bill because it does not include safeguards against government abuse of the Private Finance Initiative to advance privatisation of the NHS with damaging effects on patients and staff; gives an open-ended commitment on the part of the taxpayer to honour the liabilities of NHS Trusts irrespective of the manner in which they have accrued; and fails to ensure government appraisal and control of potential liabilities or their adequate scrutiny by Parliament."

This is a short Bill, but, if passed by the House, it will have long-lasting consequences for the national health service. The legislation raises five key points. First, it shows that the Government's promises about hospital building are set to be broken. Up and down the country, new hospitals promised by the Government are no more than castles in the air. The Secretary of State said that he is moving the programme to a higher plane—it is not merely a higher plane: it is in outer space. It is not about hospitals on the ground, but castles in the air.

Secondly, the Bill exposes the private finance initiative as a Trojan horse for privatisation. Thirdly, it offers a blank cheque of up to £5 billion from the public purse as the price of baling out the shambles of the Tories' private finance initiative. Fourthly, it ends the role of the Secretary of State in prioritising and agreeing our hospital building programme. The Secretary of State looks puzzled about that. When people read the Treasury Select Committee minutes they will understand why he is puzzled: he is slightly behind the game. When he appeared before the Treasury Select Committee he did not know that trusts have the power to borrow. The Secretary of State still looks puzzled. In the course of my speech, I shall help him to understand the unintended consequences that the Bill will have for him and for any future Secretary of State.

Fifthly, the presentation of the Bill raises serious questions about the Secretary of State's competence to run the health service or to look after public money. The problem that the Bill tries—and fails—to sort out began in 1990 when the Tories turned NHS hospitals into trusts. They made them independent and freestanding from Government and gave them the power to borrow. Because of the independence afforded by the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, the Secretary of State had the discretion only to take over the "assets, rights and liabilities" of trusts in the event of their "dissolution". He did not have to take over their liabilities. It is quite wrong to suggest that the parliamentary draftspeople were dozing and included provisions in the 1990 Act simply because they existed already.

Under this Bill, the Secretary of State will be compelled to take over the liabilities of NHS bodies in the event of their "ceasing to exist". So he must stand behind trusts' borrowings, but he does not have any power over how much they borrow, which trusts do the borrowing and why they borrow. That is why we oppose the Bill. The effect of the legislation, considered in conjunction with the rights of trusts as stated in the 1990 Act, is to give a blank cheque to independent trust hospitals. The Secretary of State will have to underwrite any liabilities that are incurred, even though he has no control over how they are incurred. By his own hand—pushed by the bankers, of course—the Secretary of State will have the worst of all worlds—responsibility without power.

The reason why the Secretary of State rushed the Bill into Parliament without properly thinking it through has nothing to do with the potato traders. All his talk about traders is disingenuous. When he says traders, he means bankers. The Secretary of State rushed the Bill into Parliament without properly thinking it through because he is a desperate man.

The Secretary of State's private finance initiative policy for new hospital building is a shambles. The Government have made themselves completely dependent on private finance for hospital building. They have slashed the public funds for NHS capital projects. The Budget cut the NHS capital programme by 17 per cent. in just one year. The Secretary of State promised that the gap would be filled by using private money—magic money—and that he would use his Treasury acumen to bring it in. Even if he delivers everything that he promised on the PFI—a total of £135 million next year—that is less than half what he has cut from the NHS capital programme.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: In a moment.

In their speeches and the briefings that appeared in the press, the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave the strong impression that building was about to begin on PFI-based new hospital contracts. New hospitals have been trumpeted for Norwich, Carlisle, Amersham and Swindon. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State now says that is absolutely untrue. Is he telling the House that it will not happen?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Lady draws no distinction between Amersham, where I have made an announcement that the hospital is to go ahead, and Norwich and Carlisle, where the projects are still subject to assessment. If we are still assessing the projects, how can I possibly say that they will go ahead? I have never said—nor would I say—that decisions have been made to go ahead with those

projects. We have decided to go ahead with three hospitals since Budget day and I listed them in the House this afternoon. The others are subject to assessment, as the hon. Lady and the House would expect.

Ms Harman: I cannot answer for anything that the Secretary of State might say. I simply refer to his speech to the Royal College of Physicians on 21 November. If he is telling people in Norwich, Carlisle, Amersham, Swindon, north Durham and Bishop Auckland that they cannot expect the hospitals that he promised, we want some clarity on that. The Secretary of State trumpeted them as his six flagship hospitals, first on the front page of *The Independent* on 30 May 1995, secondly, in the *Health Service Journal* on 5 October 1995 and, thirdly, in *The Independent* on 27 November 1995. In his speech to the Royal College of Physicians on 21 November, the Secretary of State said:

"Over the next few months . . . we shall see a regular flow of new projects",

but it seems to be a flow of projects for paperwork in the Department of Health, not for building work on new hospitals.

What is the real position? Just last week, the Secretary of State was asked by the Treasury Select Committee whether any PFI contracts had actually been signed. The answer was no. None of the deals for the new hospitals has been signed. We have to watch him when he says that they have been agreed or given the go ahead. My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) was absolutely right about that.

The Secretary of State says that he has agreed contracts, but he is not paying for them. The local hospital trust has agreed them, but it is not paying for them. The people who are supposed to be paying for them—the banks—have not agreed them, so now he is backpedalling fast and no contracts have been signed. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members say that he is not. They should have seen him on the Select Committee, when he said that he was trying to play them down. He is playing them down now because he is in deep trouble as the PFI is a shambles. The Secretary of State told the Treasury Select Committee that he could not say when the contracts will be signed. Now he is trying to play them down, but his promises to people throughout the country are set to be broken.

The Secretary of State follows a common pattern with each of the six flagship hospitals. First, he announces a new hospital, then there is a delay because the project has to be referred to get private finance, then a private finance initiative proposal emerges, but it involves far fewer beds than there are now or than were originally planned and finally, there is nothing—no contract is signed and no work begins. It is the same story up and down the country.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): It is fantasy finance.

Ms Harman: As my hon. Friend says, it is fantasy finance. Let us look at each of the flagship hospitals. The first is Norwich and Norfolk district general hospital.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I shall give way when I have dealt with the six flagship hospitals. I shall also deal with the hon. Gentleman's hospital because the Secretary of State will not tell him when it will be started.

Let me quote from a Department of Health press release about the Norfolk and Norwich hospital. The Secretary of State is screwing up his eyes to read it. Let me read it to him. It is headed:

"Go-ahead for new £100 million hospital in Norwich".

The only problem is that it is dated 1990. There has been plenty of time to write on the back of envelopes, but no hospital has been built. In the press statement, the then Secretary of State for Health, who is now Chancellor of the Exchequer, confidently told local people:

"Construction for the new hospital is expected to start in 1992"—

but it did not. Six years after the first announcement, there is still no hospital. No contract has been signed and the people of Norwich are still waiting for their new hospital. When will they get it?

Mr. Dorrell: I was a junior Health Minister in 1990. I was responsible for what was rather quaintly called unconventional finance. Since then, the rules for the use of private capital within the health service have been changed, as the Opposition often argued should happen, and have moved in the direction for which the Opposition argued. The hon. Lady should welcome the fact that an announcement made six years ago is now a great deal closer to fruition.

Ms Harman: The Secretary of State said that he was Minister for unconventional finance. He is now Secretary of State for unconventional finance and where is it?

It is the same story in Carlisle. Plans for a new hospital were developed as long ago as 1989. By summer 1994, the trust had finalised and submitted its plans. Carlisle Hospitals NHS trust reached the stage of signing a contract with the public sector two years ago, but it had to be stopped when the Government required the project to get private finance. Again, although the plan was first mooted in 1989, no contract has yet been signed and the people of Carlisle are still waiting for their new hospital.

It is the same story in Amersham. The plan to develop Amersham and Wycombe hospitals was approved in October 1994. Then the Tories changed the rules and said that any new hospital required private finance. No contract has been signed and no building has been started. The people of Amersham are still waiting for their new hospital.

It is the same in Swindon. The Secretary of State gave approval for a replacement for the Princess Margaret hospital in December 1993. He gave it what would now be described as the go-ahead, but in October 1994 the project was required to get private finance. No contract has been signed and the people of Swindon are still waiting for their hospital.

In north Durham, the Department of Health agreed plans with North Durham Acute NHS trust for a new district general hospital in January 1994. Then the Department said, "Sorry, but none of that is going forward. You must obtain private finance." No contract has been signed and the people of Durham are still waiting for their hospital.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I have a letter from North Durham Acute hospital trust saying that it will now consider two private sector bids for financing. That letter promises that the first phase of a new hospital will

[Mr. Gerry Steinberg]

be built by 1999. My hon. Friend's remarks are deeply worrying. I will be meeting the trust's chief executive, Colin Douglas, on Friday. Does my hon. Friend advise me to tell Mr. Douglas that he ought to look elsewhere for finance and not depend on the private sector because the Government will not give their permission?

Ms Harman: The problem is that if the trust looks to the public sector, it will find that Government finance for hospital building has been slashed. If the trust looks to the private sector, it will discover a whole load of bankers saying, "Health service PFI does not add up under this Government." My hon. Friend illustrates the situation well. Durham is the location of supposedly one of the programme's flagship hospitals, yet the terms of the contract have not even been agreed with the parties who are to design, finance and build that hospital—let alone the matter of getting the money from the banks.

Plans for rebuilding Bishop Auckland hospital have been in the pipeline since 1988. In 1993, local Members of Parliament received assurances from the now chair of the Tory party, then Minister of State in the Department of Health, that a new hospital would be built. In 1994, the Chancellor announced that the hospital would have to secure private finance. Again, no contract has been signed and the people of Bishop Auckland are still waiting for their hospital. The Tories' new hospital building programme is a cruel hoax—nothing more than the launching and relaunching of six flagship hospital projects, none of them built. The flow of announcements increases, but the building of new hospitals fails to materialise. The hopes of local people are raised, then dashed.

Where does that leave the Secretary of State? In the PFI process, the right hon. Gentleman has shown himself incompetent. He makes promises, trumpets them on the front pages of newspapers, and then discovers that he cannot deliver because the bankers will not sign the cheques. The whole thing is a shambles. The Secretary of State was so keen to air dogma that he overlooked the detail, which has nothing to do with potato traders. The private sector will not sign contracts involving tens of millions of pounds under current law, and it is easy to understand why. The private sector must have a contract with the trust, which is the private sector partner. Under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, the Secretary of State can abolish a trust and does not have to pick up its liabilities. Any banker would be unwise to enter into a contract valued at hundreds of millions of pounds with a public sector partner that can be abolished by the Secretary of State—so the bankers will not sign. The Secretary of State did not notice that fact before announcing the PFI and cutting public sector funds, but the bankers drew it to his attention.

Because the bankers will not sign, the Secretary of State has rushed this new Bill into the House, telling us that it is about potatoes. Although the Secretary of State taking over all the debts will sort out the problems for the private sector, the Bill will create impossible problems for the public sector. The trusts retain the independent status that they were given under the 1990 Act. The Secretary of State has no powers of control over them and underwrites all their liabilities in the Bill. He is making a blanket agreement to stand behind liabilities over which he has no statutory control. The Secretary of State is abolishing any control over or accountability for major areas of NHS capital funding. He is offering the banks a blank cheque from the taxpayer, and he tells the House that that is a mere technicality. Why should the public purse pay for NHS trust liabilities if the public have not played a part in agreeing to those liabilities? The Bill will make it impossible for the Government to oversee the £5 billion of borrowing allowed in schedule 3, which will end up as public expenditure.

Last week, the Treasury Select Committee took evidence from the Secretary of State for Health and asked him about PFI. Fortunately I was present to hear the right hon. Gentleman's replies. I pay tribute to the skilful questioning of my hon. Friends the Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) and for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). They asked the Secretary of State about the implications of the Bill. Let us consider the right hon. Gentleman's replies.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Surely the hon. Lady will give way now?

Ms Harman: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman when I reach the point in my speech about which he is asking, but I have not reached it yet.

The Select Committee asked why the Bill is needed now. The Secretary of State replied that the Bill remedies a problem that has existed since 1948. In fact, the problem has arisen only since the 1990 Act, which established trusts as independent. Before, they were an integral part of the NHS and their actions were controlled by and accountable to the Secretary of State. The right hon. Gentleman has not just stumbled across a problem that has been invisible for almost 50 years, but he created the situation. He was a Minister in the Department when trusts were made freestanding in 1990.

The Select Committee asked what controls exist over trust borrowing. As that question was put, the Secretary of State rudely interrupted and said that trusts do not have the power to borrow—he denied that trusts have the power to borrow. He had not read the 1990 Act. Even though the right hon. Gentleman served on the Committee that considered that legislation, was a Minister in the Department of Health and is now presenting a Bill to guarantee trust liabilities, he had not asked himself whether trusts can borrow and whether he has any control over them. The Secretary of State asserted that trusts do not have the power to borrow, not knowing that they have to borrow. That is a spectacular admission of ignorance, particularly as the Bill requires the right hon. Gentleman and any future Secretary of State for Health to stand behind liabilities accrued by borrowing trusts.

In case the Secretary of State still has not grasped the point, I refer him to schedule 3 to the 1990 Act, under which NHS trusts can borrow—forget about section 10, which does not override schedule 3. The only restrictions are that trusts should not mortgage their assets, borrow foreign currency or together borrow more than £5 billion. Trusts can borrow without the Secretary of State' approval. They do not have to tell him that they are borrowing—they do not even have to notify him. It is all the more extraordinary that the Secretary of State had

forgotten—perhaps he never knew—that trusts have borrowing powers, given that my hon. Friends and I have asked parliamentary questions about that aspect.

Last December, my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) asked the Secretary of State how many national health service trusts had borrowed money from commercial sources. The answer was

"Information on national health service trusts' borrowing from commercial sources during the year is not available".—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. *35*.]

The trusts have the power to borrow, but they do not have to tell the Secretary of State.

We all know that the trusts have not borrowed much in the past six years. They have not been able to borrow because they have not had security for the loans and they cannot mortgage their assets. But the Bill would give them blanket security for all loans. Under the 1990 Act, they will be able to borrow up to £5 billion. The Secretary of State wants to rush the Bill through the House and press on with the PFI, not only to save himself the embarrassment of all the broken promises of new hospitals that have not materialised, but because, under the Tories, the PFI in the NHS is a Government ramp for privatisation.

Under the Tories, the PFI is not a public-private partnership, but the private sector cherry-picking deals. Under the Tories, the PFI is not private finance working in the public interest, but private commercial interests driving into the heart of the NHS. Market testing is already threatening to privatise clinical support services. The PFI is set to accelerate that yet faster and will let the private sector take over not only the design, building, financing and operation of hospitals, but the running of clinical services.

The Secretary of State says that he will not let clinical services be put out to the private sector—with a qualification—without the consent of local clinicians. That reassurance means nothing because the Secretary of State will not define what he means by clinical services and nor will he identify any mechanisms for establishing the consent or otherwise of local clinicians. Presumably, he means that if anyone applies for a job when it is advertised by the private sector, that will signify the support of local clinicians. It is no surprise that the Secretary of State does not want to be specific, because he knows that the medical profession and all those who work in the health service are wholly opposed to privatisation, especially the privatisation of clinical services.

The PFI is already set to create the first privatised NHS hospital, in Stonehaven in Scotland. The design, building and management of a new hospital, including the delivery of clinical services, will be put out to tender to private sector bidders. When the private sector is designing, building, financing, operating and running the hospital, and employing the doctors and nurses, that is privatisation and that is what the Government are all about.

The Secretary of State has asked about our position. Our position is perfectly clear, but the Secretary of State must try to distinguish between our criticisms of what he is doing and our plans for what we would do. We have made it clear that when private finance can work in partnership with public finance in the public interest to secure investment, we welcome it. We have led the way—across the whole range of services, and especially transport—in realising that private finance can work in the public interest, but we have always been clear that our health service must be run by the NHS and that private finance must be in partnership with public finance, not a substitute for it. The public sector, not the private sector, must set priorities in the public interest.

We believe that the Tories are using the PFI in health as a back door to privatisation. This debate raises serious questions about whether people will get their much-needed hospitals.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On several occasions, the hon. Lady has said that she would give way to me in a moment. Could you, Madam Deputy Speaker, tell us what a parliamentary moment is, as I fear she has not the guts to give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Whether an hon. Member gives way is not a matter for the Chair.

Ms Harman: I have just remembered that every time I have given way to the hon. Gentleman previously, he has asked me questions that had nothing to do with the issue that we were debating. I reminded myself not to waste my time, or that of the House, by answering his questions.

The Bill also raises serious questions about public services and public accountability, because the Tories are not hostile to public spending. They are hostile to public services. When it comes to the chance to privatise and subsidise the private sector, money is no object. The Tories are not prudent with the public purse, they are reckless with it. That is what the Bill is about. For the sake of our public services and the accountability of the public purse, I call on the House to decline to give the Bill a Second Reading and to support our amendment.

6.4 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): We have been treated to a speech of quite stunning disingenuousness by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). We have heard a series of criticisms of the private finance initiative, which is now beginning to deliver benefits to my constituents and those of other right hon. and hon. Members, but we have heard not one scrap of detail about how the Opposition propose to alter the rules of the PFI to bring about the remedies that they claim are now needed. We have seen a rather feeble attempt to gloss over the differences between the hon. Lady, with her avowed hostility to the whole concept of the private finance initiative, and her deputy, the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who—rather than decry the PFI—wishes to claim authorship of it for himself and for his party.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Surely the differences are not just between hon. Members on the Front Bench but between the hon. Member for Peckham and the local Labour parties in Dartford and Gravesham, which fully support the private finance initiative in the construction of a new hospital on the Darenth Park site. The hon. Lady must know that because she has made inquiries, but she has not raised that point today. That tells me that she knows that there are no votes in the line that she is taking in the constituency of Dartford.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend makes his point well.

We also heard a series of criticisms from the hon. Member for Peckham of the reduction in planned tax finance capital expenditure on the NHS in the plans published in the Budget for the financial year 1996-97. We did not, of course, hear that, even at that reduced level, capital spending on the NHS in the next financial year would still be some 50 per cent. higher than the level that the Conservative party inherited from the Labour party when we took office in 1979.

I listened very carefully to the hon. Lady's speech and I noticed that, once again, while she criticised the Government for alleged parsimony in the capital funding of public services, she was careful to make no commitment on the part of herself, her Front-Bench team or her party to increase by one penny, let alone by the billions of pounds which she claims are needed, the amount that a putative Labour Government would be prepared to spend on the NHS. The Opposition are prepared to talk in a way that encourages expectations, but again and again they refuse to spell out the cost and how it would be met.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is that not exactly what the disabled persons thought when they went to Labour party headquarters? The Labour party does a lot of talking, but it does not give much commitment.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend puts her points in as forceful and telling a manner as usual.

Nor would one guess from listening to the hon. Member for Peckham that capital projects under the traditional Treasury route have often been subject to prolonged delay and change stretching over many years. That applies to hospitals, roads and railway projects. It is inherent in capital spending, which is dependent on Treasury finance, that it becomes subject to the exigencies of overall Government priorities for public spending. The fate of individual projects can depend on the horse trading that takes place each year between spending Departments and the Treasury on which area of the Government's overall programme should get priority for that financial year.

I want to talk briefly about the project that I know best—the one approved for the South Buckinghamshire NHS trust Amersham and High Wycombe hospitals. Although they are located just outside my constituency, they serve a great many of my constituents as well as those of my hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) and for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan).

As the hon. Member for Peckham pointed out, the South Buckinghamshire NHS trust was putting together proposals for a major capital building programme before the latest private finance initiative was launched. The project, approved in the Budget statement last year, will deliver new hospital facilities much more quickly than local people had dreamt was possible, had they had to take their turn in the queue at the Treasury door, via the traditional funding route. Moreover, the design of the new buildings, and their location, not to mention the way the various facilities will be distributed between the two sites at Amersham and Wycombe, will deliver higher-quality clinical services than would have been achieved under the plans originally drafted by local management using the traditional Treasury funding route. It is clear to me from my recent talks with local trust managers and clinicians that they unanimously welcome the PFI, as hastening the prospect of top-quality hospital facilities for local people.

We have heard Labour party criticism of the alleged laxity of financial controls in the NHS—the alleged risk of money matters going wrong. Having looked at the projects planned in Buckinghamshire, I find it difficult to understand how anyone could believe that. I have seen the proposals for new buildings crawled over, first by the trusts and their advisers, then by the regional health authority, then by the NHS executive, then by the Department of Health and Treasury officials—all to make sure that the right safeguards are in place and that the outcome will be good NHS provision to suit the needs of local people, at a price that will deliver value for money to the taxpayer.

As the PFI progresses, there are still some difficulties to be resolved. It is a new procedure, and I am sure that Ministers will want to learn from experience of the first projects so as to be able to improve procedures as the initiative takes hold and gathers pace.

I should like to direct the Under-Secretary's attention to two points in particular. First, I hope that Ministers will always be alert to the need to avoid detailed discussions getting bogged down in the sort of Treasury-Whitehall theology that has delayed projects in the past. As an example, I offer the distinction between a finance lease and an operating lease. A finance lease amounts to providing borrowing to pay for an asset, and that would count within the public sector borrowing requirement. An operating lease is defined as a payment for a service which may include the acquisition of a building and it does not count in the PSBR. I hope that we can avoid lengthy arguments between groups of accountants in various public bodies; such disputes can slow down the attainment of an objective on which everyone is fundamentally agreed.

Secondly, I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will look closely at hospital trusts that may want to apply through the PFI for funding for construction—and perhaps maintenance—of buildings, but not necessarily for the management of facilities also. It will be precisely the hospital trusts that have made the greatest progress towards contracting out many of their ancillary services which may find it more difficult to let a single contract to a PFI partner for the management of those services in future.

I am certain that my right hon. and hon. Friends will try to learn from experience. I am also sure that this initiative bodes well for my constituents and for those of many other hon. Members. I wish the policy and the Bill well.

6.14 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): When I heard the Secretary of State speaking, I was reminded of the questions that Tony Hancock asked himself shortly before he committed suicide: "What does it all mean? Why I am here? Where are we going?" He answered the questions as follows: "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know." The Secretary of State spoke for 50 minutes, telling us that this Bill changed nothing. I should hate to listen to him moving the Second Reading of a Bill that did change something.

Let us imagine the scene. It is Tuesday 27 February, late evening. The shadow Secretary of State for Health is at home after a hard day. She is lost in reverie; suddenly her whole world looks like crashing in—the telephone rings. There is a man on the other end of the line. His voice is cracking and he seems close to tears. It is the Secretary of State for Health. He says, "Harriet, I'm in trouble—you've got to help me. You're my friend, aren't you?"

The Secretary of State then pulls himself together and explains that he is being blackmailed by a bunch of bankers—three times tonight he used the term, a bunch of "shysters". They are, it seems, blackmailing him into passing the Bill as part of a wider negotiating package. They are telling him, "We are business men, not risk takers." There is panic in the right hon. Gentleman's voice. He says that the Bill is to be published tomorrow, and that Second Reading must be on 5 March—last Tuesday. The Bill must be through the House by Whitsun.

The shadow Secretary of State for Health stands firm, however, and is not seduced by the blandishments of a Secretary of State who is clearly trying to con her over the telephone in the middle of the night. Some people may think this story apocryphal; it tells the House what the Bill is all about.

Then, on 4 March, the Secretary of State for Health comes before the Treasury Select Committee to be questioned about the Bill and the private finance initiative. He is usually elegant and composed, but last week he look frazzled—he had obviously had a sleepless weekend. He told us that the bankers still would not sign the PFIs, and that they wanted the Bill, together with other negotiated settlements that present hurdles which he still cannot get around.

The questioning has scarcely begun when this suave, assured, sophisticated Secretary of State suddenly loses control. I know, because I was there asking him the questions. I have the transcript with me. My question, directly related to the Bill, was about the power of trusts to borrow and about how liabilities that the Secretary of State has to meet can be built up. I asked:

"Can you tell me, the trusts have the power to borrow, do they not?"

The Secretary of State replied:

"No, that is incorrect."

At that point, it was as though an electric charge had gone through the Select Committee. Everyone sat bolt upright in utter amazement. I was gobsmacked, to borrow a phrase usually used by the Governor of Hong Kong. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman had misheard the question. So, with incredulity tinged with sarcasm, I repeated it:

"The trusts do not have the power to borrow?"

The Secretary of State replied:

"The trusts do not have the power to borrow."

I am absolutely amazed by that double assertion on the part of the Secretary of State. I have in front of me a copy of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Under the heading "Borrowing", paragraph 1 of schedule 3, on the financial provisions relating to NHS trusts, states:

"(1) Subject to the provisions of this paragraph and to any limit imposed under the following provisions of this Schedule, for the purpose of its functions an NHS trust may borrow (both temporarily, by way of overdraft, and longer term) from the Secretary of State or any other person."

The Secretary of State said twice in succession that NHS trusts had no powers to borrow. We have a Secretary of State who does not know what is in his own legislation, who does not understand how trusts operate, who does not understand how schemes are paid for and how liabilities, which he will guarantee in the Bill, are built up. That is astonishing. It is incredible. By any standards, it is extraordinary.

I have been a civil servant, a parliamentary private secretary—a bit of a dogsbody—and a Member of the House. I have seen Secretaries of State who are ignorant. I have seen Secretaries of State who are very ignorant, but never before have I seen a Secretary of State whose ignorance measures force 12 on the Richter scale. That is hurricane-level ignorance. The Secretary of State's behaviour seemed a bit like that of an A-level student about to take his English examination who does not know his ABC. It was a bit like a plumber walking into a house to mend a cistern and saying that he had forgotten his tools. These were basic facts that we would expect a Minister to know.

I wonder what the civil servants who were at that meeting thought about it. When I was in the civil service, we expected our Secretary of State to go to the Dispatch Box and put on a good performance. We expected our Secretary of State to go to a Committee upstairs properly briefed with all the answers. After all, there were hundreds of us providing the Secretary of State with every single bit of information. A triumph for the Secretary of State was a triumph for us, and a failure by the Secretary of State was a failure for us. As the Secretary of State displayed this astonishing ignorance, he debased and demeaned not only his civil servants and his office but the Department for which he worked.

It is worse than that. I asked how much trusts could borrow, and how great, by way of borrowing, were the liabilities that he was prepared to undertake under the Bill. Because he does not know that a trust can borrow, I imagine that his answer is "None." Paragraph 3 of schedule 3, on limits of indebtedness in relation to trusts, which the Secretary of State thinks cannot borrow anything, reads:

"(1) The aggregate of all sums borrowed by NHS trusts established to assume responsibility for the ownership and management of, or to provide and manage, hospitals or other establishments or facilities which are situated in England"—

only England—

"shall not exceed £5,000 million or such other sum not exceeding £10,000 million as may be specified by order made by the Secretary of State with the consent of the Treasury."

This Secretary of State, apparently, is prepared to allow trusts to borrow £10 billion under his own directions without knowing what it is about. That is why there are people like me—people who have fiduciary and fiscal probity—on the Treasury Select Committee. I have seen whole Governments collapse because they borrowed £10 billion more than they should have. Yet this whiz kid, who used to work for the Treasury, goes to the Department of Health and is prepared to see trusts borrow £10 billion and know absolutely nothing about it. What on earth is happening to our country? Is it any wonder that we are a backward, fractious island off the coast of north-west Europe, with a culture that is in irreversible decline?

[Mr. Brian Sedgemore]

Why is the Secretary of State so ignorant? My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham asked that question. One answer to that is that ignorance is quite often born of arrogance and laziness. That reminds me a ditty by Cole Porter:

"It's not 'cause I shouldn't
It's not 'cause I wouldn't
And you know it's not 'cause I couldn't
It's simply because I'm the laziest man in town."

To be fair, the Secretary of State may not be the laziest man in town, but everybody in the House now knows that he is the laziest Secretary of State in Whitehall. He has made indolence an art form. If Marlowe was right when he said,

"there is no sin but ignorance",

one of the biggest sinners in the world would be the Secretary of State for Health.

The point that I want to make is that the Secretary of State continued to say that nothing could ever go wrong, that no trust would ever get to a situation where it might have many liabilities to meet, and in any case he would honour them however and wheresoever they had been caused. I shall give one example of the problems that we might face. It relates to the PFI of the Royal Hospitals NHS trust. The PFI is six, seven, eight, nine or 10 times bigger than anything that has been mentioned tonight; it is for £260 million to close St. Bartholomew's hospital and build a new 750-bed hospital in Whitechapel.

It is generally agreed that the private finance initiative is flawed, and therefore that there could be liabilities after this huge sum of money has been invested. How do I know that it is flawed? First, one of the senior figures at the East London and City health authority—the purchaser—told one of the members of the Treasury Select Committee, and I put this to one of our witnesses at the hearing, that the project was not financially viable. That is the kind of thing that my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham is saying. If someone puts in £260 million and the project is not financially available and the trust goes bust, who will pick up the tab? The Bill says that it will not be the contractors and the people who will build and manage the hospital.

We do not need simply to take the evidence of a senior figure who works for the purchaser. The financial viability was question by the York Economics Consortium, which consists of some of the most prestigious health experts in the country. It said, when expressing doubts about the capital and revenue estimates of the PFI, which will probably have to be bailed out by the Bill:

"The preferred option generates an additional saving of £9m at the cost of almost £100m in additional capital spending. For this additional capital cost to be justified, the revenue benefits of the incremental spend must be reasonably secure.

We believe that there is sufficient uncertainty around the estimates of net revenue savings . . . that the magnitude of the assumed difference in costs between the options is extremely sensitive. Since this difference is, in any case, relatively small in relation to the total revenue expenditure of the Trust . . . further evidence is needed before the additional capital expenditure of £100m required to move from a do minimum to a single site solution can be justified on a purely financial basis."

The purchaser is saying, "Here's a PFI that can build up liabilities which the Government may have to pick up from the private sector." The York Economics Consortium is saying exactly the same thing. There is also a third body, the King's Fund, which commissioned the CASPE Consulting report, which said:

"Business people are used to taking risks, but of a calculated sort. The Trust is expecting to start negotiations with Private Finance Consortia soon."

I break off there. One hundred people from the private finance world seeing £260 million coming into their hands have said that they are interested. Of course they are interested. They will be particularly interested if the Bill is passed and their liabilities are picked up if and when things go wrong.

The report continued:

"Even on the figures in the OBC"—

the outline business case—

"it would appear wise for any of the possible consortia to check whether the CASPE Consulting St. Bartholomew's Foundation option incorporating new partnerships would not produce better returns and do so much more quickly . . . even the preliminary work undertaken to date suggests that a complete reconsideration and development of a new Foundation option, incorporating the service proposals of both NHS and non NHS partners, would be wise and be likely to produce a better solution for the NHS."

Those three prestigious groups, the purchaser, the York Economics Consortium and the King's Fund, which produced the original documentation on which the private finance initiative was based, are all now saying that this is a major scheme—by the standards of everything that the Secretary of State has told us, a mega-scheme—which could go horribly wrong. If it goes horribly wrong, the private finance consortia will want the Bill. They are another group of bankers who will not sign unless they get the Bill.

The Government, in effect, are promising the private finance consortia two things. First, they are promising them the Bill and, secondly, they are saying behind our backs—I put it to the Secretary of State and he said that he knew about it, and I also put it to Gerry Green, the chief executive of the Royal Hospitals NHS trust—"We can get around this because, if we get the Bill and we have got them to sign the private finance initiative, we can increase the size of the hospital from 750 to 1,020 beds."

That requires a new outline business case. The public have been told nothing about that. If I had not raised it at a meeting of the Treasury Select Committee, no one would know it even now. It would require a new outline business case and new consultation. Therefore, this is a process to avoid the new outline business case and the new consultation. It is all predicated on first getting the Bill through and then getting the private finance consortia to sign.

The Secretary of State has said that he does not want any of the private finance initiatives to take place against—I am not sure that I have his exact words—a difficult political decision. Who does he think he is kidding? Those private finance consortia really should now think hard about exactly what they are signing and exactly what response they expect from a future Labour Government who could be in power before any of these schemes have been signed. The response that they will get is the responsible attitude of my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham. Therefore, they have a lot of worrying to do about the Bill, and so has the House.

6.32 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I am delighted to support the Bill. It is a technical but none the less important measure. It is essential that contractors and suppliers to NHS trusts are secure in their credit arrangements for the work that they do for the national health service. It is absolutely important for the suppliers and for the private finance initiative.

The PFI represents building for the future of our NHS, and it is particularly relevant to the hospitals in north-west Kent. At present, hospital provision in north-west Kent is spread across three sites—the Joyce Green hospital, north of Dartford, an old fever hospital; the West Hill hospital in Dartford, an old poor law house; and the Gravesend and North Kent hospital in my constituency, a subscription hospital from the previous century.

Our in-patient hospital services are spread across those three sites and they are administered by the Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust. They are far from ideal. In fact, those hospitals have possibly the worst fabric of any in the former south-east Thames region. Nevertheless, they work for us very well because of the dedication of our doctors and nurses and everyone else who works there. But we desperately need our new district general hospital.

For years now, as in other cases mentioned in the debate, we have seen plans come and go and be put off. The reason for that is simple. If one goes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day and asks for a cheque for £100 million, either one gets a dusty answer and it is back to the drawing board, or one is asked, "Couldn't it be done in phases on one of the existing three sites?" A first phase would be allowed immediately; then, after some scratching of heads and playing with the capital programme, there might be a second phase a few years down the road; later still, there might be a third phase.

The new district general hospital for north-west Kent has been designed, redesigned and redesigned again. Round and round we have gone. That is not to say that the Government have not been building new hospitals. I wanted to make this point when I tried to intervene on the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), but her courage failed her and she did not feel able to give way as she had promised to do on a number of occasions. The Government have had a massive hospital capital programme. Since they came to office in 1979, there have been 800 major new hospital projects, each costing more than £1 million. I could have pointed out to the hon. Lady that that rate of investment is more than four times greater than that under the previous Labour Government. Nevertheless, our hospital in north-west Kent has not yet been built and nor have the others to which she referred. That is the crux of the issue.

We could wait in a long queue for the capital programme to come forward from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Of course, it is a better programme than Labour ever had, but it is not moving fast enough for us in north-west Kent or in those other places that have been mentioned. That is why the PFI is so valuable and why I and my constituents resent the ridiculous political posturing of the hon. Member for Peckham. It is not good enough. We want our hospital. The hon. Lady opposes the PFI yet makes no commitment on behalf of the Labour Government that she hopes might be elected. That leaves my constituents in the limbo with which they are all too familiar, but with the difference that they would be without hope.

The PFI has given my constituents hope. They have hope because the Government, through the NHS trust, have invited bids under the PFI to build that new general hospital in north-west Kent. Four major consortia have come forward keen to succeed in their bid to build and finance the hospital and, in the long term, to run its housekeeping—the servicing, the cleaning, the provision of groundsmen, the parking arrangements, the catering and a number of ancillary services. Under the PFI, they would provide the hospital, by means of a long lease for which they would be paid a substantial fee, and all the services. When I bear in mind the fact that the budget of our NHS trust is £56 million a year, there is obviously a certain amount of scope to do precisely that.

That is not privatisation. It is private provision under a contract, but the important point which is of concern to my constituents is that the NHS will put in the doctors, consultants, nurses, medical support, administration and booking arrangements so that we obtain the best possible health care from the facilities provided.

Thanks to the PFI, four consortia are bidding to build the brand new general hospital in north-west Kent. There are big names among them. Each consortium includes a major construction company—obviously so, as they are keen to secure the contract to build a major project—a catering and hotel servicing company, a financial company and a project administration company. They are likely to create an on-going, functioning hospital, with all the efficiency that the private sector can provide when its money is on the line.

As I told the House, we were always told to have a phase here and a phase there built on current locations, which would mean Joyce Green hospital near Dartford, a site immensely unpopular in Gravesend and not much more popular in Dartford. The old NHS financing system—still supported by the Labour party—would have led to a new hospital at Joyce Green. When we asked the four private sector bidders, through the bidding process, where they would build the new hospital for north-west Kent—surprise, surprise—the message from came back loud and clear: Joyce Green is unsuitable for a new hospital. That is most fascinating for my constituents.

The bidders would prefer the Darenth Park site between Dartford and Gravesend because that is the site preferred by my constituents and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson). That is what happens when the private sector is used, rather than the old-fashioned, bureaucratic system that we had in the past and in which Labour has a great belief.

Where are we now? The four bids are being considered carefully and in detail. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Peckham to make great fun about assessment, but my constituents want arrangements for the hospital to be thorough so that it will deliver our hospital services over many decades. We are not playing games when it comes to the health care of people in north-west Kent. I hope that that assessment is thorough and quick. All the signs are that that is precisely what is happening. We shall soon have a shortlist of two. There will then be public consultation of my constituents, who will be the patients in those hospitals. The contractual negotiations will then take place with a view to contracts being signed this autumn. Under the new PFI system, my constituents have the best chance of progress that they have had under any Government.

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

When the contracts are completed and the project has been constructed and is operating, Joyce Green and West Hill hospitals in Dartford will pass into history and the Gravesend and North Kent hospital facility will become free and available. For many years, my constituents have had a dream: to have their own community hospital providing basic health care in Gravesend. Gravesend and North Kent hospital will have the opportunity to pass to the Thameslink Healthcare Services NHS trust. It will serve a conurbation of 100,000 souls in Gravesham and Southfleet, and in Longfield and New Barn in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford. It will provide valuable services in our town: minor injuries, out-patients, acute active rehabilitation, elderly care, general practitioner beds, primary health, physiotherapy, dental and diagnostic services, all in a community hospital that my constituents dearly wish to have. Again, that will be financed through a private finance initiative currently costed to the tune of £8.5 million.

If the NHS were structured and financed under the old Labour system, to which the hon. Member for Peckham seems to wish to return, my constituents would have remained in a queue for many years. It is now clear that the Conservative Government, with their new and imaginative PFI system, are taking our hospital project forward. We are already seeing the benefits of the NHS reforms. Fundholding general practices in my constituency have been successful beyond our wildest dreams.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. I am always happy to have passing references to local matters, but he seems to be moving a long way from the subject of the Bill. The Bill concerns winding things up rather than starting them off, which appears to be the main subject of his speech.

Mr. Arnold: The concern is that, if either of the two trusts to which I have referred—which will develop our general hospital or our community hospital—faced the risk of being wound up and of leaving creditors with no one to pursue, the contracts for the PFI and for supply of hospitals could be in doubt. That is why the Bill is so relevant. I am outlining my constituents' hopes, which could not be fulfilled under the old structure of financing the NHS, to which the Labour party remains wedded. The fulfilment of those hopes must be guaranteed by the passage of the Bill, which would ensure that proper financial security exists for PFI contractors and for suppliers. That is vital.

That is the reason why I was distressed to hear the Opposition spokeswoman time and again attacking the PFI. Perhaps somewhat naively, my constituents and I took to heart the Leader of the Opposition's comment:

"The PFI is right in principle."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1077.]

I thought that this matter might have gone out of the party political arena, but the performance of the Labour spokeswoman for health threw all those hopes out of the window by seeming to bring sterile party political battles into it. We heard quoted her comment to the Birmingham Health conference on 13 January this year:

"I don't call it a Private Finance Initiative, I call it a privatisation initiative."

What is that supposed to mean? It appears to be hostile to the PFI, which is born out by the fact that the Labour party intends to vote against the Bill tonight.

We want the PFI. My constituents will understand and share my view that, apparently, we need a Conservative Government to take the PFI forward this and the other side of the next general election. Our hospital dreams depend on it. The PFI and all the legislation needed to make it a reality is vital to my constituents because, in respect of hospitals for north-west Kent, the PFI is turning dreams into reality.

6.47 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The debate is prompted and motivated, and the Bill has been introduced, for two obvious reasons. There is the theoretical, academic reason, explained probably six times by the Secretary of State for Health in his speech. It is that the Secretary of State of the day might not pick up the tab if a trust were to be dissolved and left with debts. The real reason, however, is that the problem came to light once the Government started going at much greater speed than ever before down the private finance initiative road. That was the explanation. The Secretary of State was honest about it. The current law allows discretion for the Secretary of State to say, "No, sorry—I am not picking up the tab."

Clearly, dealing with the "not picking up the tab" point is important. In the part of the world from which I come, the South Thames training and enterprise council went to the wall a year and a quarter ago. The Secretary of State for Employment, as he then was—he is now Secretary of State for Defence—suddenly wound it up, and a number of people who had traded with it in the belief that it was an agent of Government were left whistling for their money: training providers, local colleges and local firms. Many never received their money.

The Government did the dirty. They claimed their entitlement, saying, "We are the preferred creditors, so we shall take our money first even if others must suffer." I know all about agents, or agencies, of Government that claim to be supported by the Treasury or other Departments, but are eventually shown to be other than what they claim. With members of the other main parties, I went to see the Secretary of State, and he told us that the same applied to local councils. If a council went to the wall, the Government could say, "Sorry, but we will not bail you out." A council could be declared bankrupt, but the Government would not be obliged to support it.

I believe that the Government should be responsible for Government agencies. Theoretically, therefore, I am happy for the law to be amended. But this is not just a theoretical issue—it is a practical issue. We are having this debate because the Government have clearly said that they cannot sign the PFI contracts—as emerged in the Select Committee on 4 March, none has yet been signed—unless assurances can be given that people will never be left whistling for their money. The reason is clear: the private sector partners will not play ball. I understand why they do not want to find themselves in bigger difficulties than they would otherwise.

That raises a general question that I have raised in the House before. When and where did Parliament decide that the national health service should become dependent on the private finance initiative in regard to capital projects?

Unless I missed it, or it was written in invisible ink, nothing to that effect was included in the manifesto on which the Conservatives fought the last general election and, under our funny electoral system, won the election despite the fact that most people voted against them.

Since then, there has never been a formal statement of Government policy telling us that, in future, the capital building programme of the NHS will be funded by the private sector. The Government have allowed the PFI to creep in. They have said that they intend to rely on it in more and more ways, but they have not been so straightforward with the House. It is clear—this, too, emerged in the Treasury Select Committee—that, according to the original proposal put to Parliament by different Departments, the PFI was a way of raising extra money: it was not intended to serve as an excuse for substituting private for public money.

As was clear from the public expenditure statements made to the House at the end of November, there will be a 12.7 per cent. reduction in next year's publicly funded NHS capital programme. The Secretary of State confirmed that fact to the Select Committee. Although he did not say so explicitly, he was honest enough to accept that in reality the PFI is unlocking private money to make up for the fact that the Government are not committing public money to the hospital building programme.

My colleagues and I have no theological objection to the use of the private sector to supply public services. That is done every day of the week by, for instance, education authorities buying books for schools. We do, however, object to discovering suddenly that the proposition on which we had relied—that the hospital building programme, and other NHS capital projects, would be publicly funded—has been replaced by a proposal to cut public funding and replace it with private finance. I shall not vote for that unless we have tested to our satisfaction the proposition that we are to get better value for money—a proposition which, as recently as a year ago, was not supported by the Treasury. A year ago, the Treasury was still advising the Department of Health that the PFI would probably prove more rather than less expensive.

Let us suppose that a private sector consortium was commissioned to build a hospital. Let us also suppose that it was assumed that the private sector would use the hospital for 50 years, and that a 50-year rental agreement was drawn up. According to previous Treasury advice, even if the hospital was transferred to the public sector at the end of those 50 years for no more than the rental payment, the payments spread over that period would amount to more than would be involved in borrowing to spend now. We all know why that is: it is cheaper for the Government to borrow money than for anyone else to do so, because they are the most secure of all borrowers. It had always been assumed that they were the best borrower, because they obtained the best rates. If the Government were going to borrow to fund an NHS capital building programme, that was the cheapest way of providing the service.

When I have seen the evidence that proves what the Secretary of State now asserts, which is contrary to Treasury advice given less than a year ago—that it is cheaper for the private sector to build hospitals in Amersham, Scotland, the east end of London, on the south bank of the Thames and in Carlisle, for instance—I shall find it difficult to argue that that is not in the interests of the taxpayer and the consumer. But it has not been proved, and yet again we are putting the cart before the horse. We are cutting NHS capital expenditure. There is no argument about that: the Secretary of State has admitted that there is to be a 12.7 per cent. cut next year, and according to the Chancellor's Red Book over the next few years we shall see the largest relative reduction in expenditure on the health service capital programme since 1948.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): No.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, we shall. Since 1948, public expenditure on the health service has grown regularly, year on year. It has gone up and down, but the overall graph has risen. Over the next few years, as projected by the Chancellor, we shall see the greatest slowdown ever in the commitment of public capital expenditure to the NHS, and in its expansion. I can show the Minister the figures, which are in the public domain.

I shall not vote for such action, because I believe that the case must be proved before we sign up to it—and I will not sign up to action for which the motivation is driven not by accountancy or a desire for value for money, but by the approach of a general election which must be preceded by the delivery of tax cuts. The Chancellor delivered tax cuts last November; we opposed them, Labour abstained and the Government voted for them. He wants to deliver tax cuts next November; I assume that we shall again vote against them, Labour will again abstain and the Government will again vote for them. The only way in which the Chancellor can do that is by keeping down public expenditure, which means that he must transfer not just the risk but the cost to the private sector. A year ago, the Treasury said that that was the more expensive option, and I do not believe that those advisers have suddenly changed their minds.

I would be very happy with a procedure whereby the Treasury and Health Select Committees and the House took evidence from everyone concerned and subsequently decided whether the PFI was cheaper for hospital building, the provision of clinical services or a mixture of the two. That is what good legislation and policy should mean. But I am certainly not happy to sign up to something that says, "Last year it was bad news; this year it is good news." We have seen no evidence to show that anything has changed. I am less happy because, while the national health service is supposed to be run democratically, trusts meet and take decisions in secret and are accountable to nobody in the public whom they serve. They are accountable only to civil servants and the Secretary of State for Health.

The decision-making process to select the consortium to which a hospital project will go is not out in the open. Nor will a privately financed project be demonstrably cheaper—over 50 years, it may be more expensive. No one has agreed to that process apart from people who meet in secret behind closed doors. The public have not agreed to it. The Secretary of State told the Select Committee that financial deals with the private sector would not be approved unless those involved on the clinical side agreed. Who is to say to how many people, and to whom, the Government will talk? I have had plenty of experience of the Secretary of State talking to people in the health service and saying that they have agreed when they have not or when some have agreed and others have disagreed. That is why there is a risk.

[Mr. Hughes]

I have a practical suggestion about how we should proceed. I do not want a system that tells me after the event whether a project is good value for money but one that tells me that before the event. I do not want a civil servant, the accounting officer, to report privately to the chief accounting officer, the chief executive of the NHS, through documents that the public cannot see and say whether a project is good value for money. I would be happy for an independent person such as the Comptroller and Auditor General to do that job. If his office said, "Right, go ahead, it is cheaper, and you can go ahead because it is better value for money," the project should go ahead. However, until and unless publicly accountable independent people, not employed by the Government of the day, give that advice so that the public can see and hear it, we are being asked to sign up to an unacceptable proposition.

The Minister will know of the example of the proposals before the Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust because it serves many of his constituents. Surprise, surprise—the trust has got a bit of a private finance initiative idea. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) made the point well that the PFI is being used an excuse for further delaying things that were about to go ahead. South of the river, we were about to go ahead with an outline business case that had been worked out by the trust. We were told that it was ready to be the final business case, but it never quite saw the light of day.

It was a bit like snakes and ladders. Just as we were about to move off the square, we were told, "Sorry, you've got to down the snake marked private finance initiative." We have to go back to the beginning to find whether the proposal that was worked up as part of trust's public sector plan could be done more cheaply in the private sector. It may be true, as was said earlier, that there had been no development for six years at Norwich hospital, but the PFI means having to go round an extra loop, which may take a year or two, before getting back to where one started. There is no guarantee that anything will have been achieved because it may prove that it would be more expensive to use the PFI than to use the original public route. The real issue about capital programmes and capital spend in the health service is ensuring that there is an accountable way of getting value for money irrespective of whether projects are in the public or private sectors.

I was delighted when the right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission, told me last Monday that the Comptroller and Auditor General will investigate what has been happening south of the river, where a building project for Philip Harris house and associated works that were originally to have cost £56 million are now scheduled to cost £157 million. They were originally due to be finished in 1993; now, if we are lucky, they will be finished in 1997. That is the sort of question that I want answered.

The Government commissioned a building which, three years ago, they called the flagship building of the national health service. Why we are now told that we shall have to spend another £112 million on a new building on another site to do work for which the building on which we have just spent £150 million is specially built and equipped? Those are the questions that my constituents want answered. I am delighted that the Comptroller and Auditor General is to investigate them. I wish that he had been monitoring the system all through and made sure that projects, once money has been committed to them as being the best value for money, are seen through and that Government and officials behind closed doors do not suddenly change their minds about how to use buildings.

We will win the argument and prove that Philip Harris house should be used for its intended purpose. We will show that it will still be better value for money to use the building on which the money has been spent and not commit another £112 million somewhere else. I hope that the Government also realise that unless they agree, they will be throwing extra public money after that which they are already committed to spend.

Let us address the real questions, get the evidence out in the open and have an informed debate. We should not deceive ourselves that this is all about sharing risks. It is no more about sharing risks now, or in the future, than it has been in the past. Risks have always been shared. Whenever the health service commissions work from a private builder, there is a shared risk. If the private builder takes three years or goes bust, the project is covered by contracts and insurance. The health service was no worse off in that situation than it would be if a consortium and the health service, on behalf of the taxpayer, proposed to build or expand a hospital, clinic or other facility together.

I am happy to sign up to something which says that the NHS trusts should not suddenly leave people whistling for their money, but I am not prepared to do so without ever having been asked to approve the proposal that we replace public by private money and start moving the whole NHS capital building programme from the public sector to the private sector. Until and unless we are given some assurances about the way in which the health service is going and whether it is being openly and accountably managed so that we can see that we are getting the best value for money for everyone, we shall reserve our position on the Bill and vote for Labour's reasoned amendment. We shall not vote if there is a Division on Second Reading because we cannot approve a package deal that conceals more than it reveals.

7.6 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Labour Members' speeches consisted mainly of a combination of synthetic outrage and scaremongering. I exclude the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) from that charge. His was a more reasoned critique of the private finance initiative, although I do not entirely agree with what he had to say.

The Bill is largely a technical measure but nevertheless one of some importance. It is necessary to ensure the continuing success of the PFI in the NHS. The PFI already greatly benefits the health service.

Before the autumn statement in 1992, hon. Members will recall that Treasury orthodoxy was implacably opposed to the use of private capital on public sector projects. Almost any suggestion immediately fell foul of the notorious Ryrie rules, which were almost designed to ensure that the conditions set for privately financed projects were impossible to meet. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health who, as Financial Secretary, had the imagination to ignore the mandarins and break free of the rigid Treasury constraints.

It was perhaps unsurprising that, to begin with, attention focused on opportunities to use private capital for transport projects because it is easier to create a stream of income from tolling which would give private investors their return on such projects. For services that are specifically free to the user, such as the NHS, it is more complicated to ensure the return on capital. However, the advantages of private sector involvement in the financing of capital projects are the same as in every other area of public sector provision. They include the opportunity to take advantage of additional skills and expertise, to gain access to new sources of capital and to transfer risk. Private sector involvement allows the NHS to share overheads and benefit from economies of scale.

There is no reason why publicly funded health care has to be supplied by publicly financed and managed hospitals. When the NHS takes on the design and construction of new facilities, it is exposed to risks that can impose costs and reduce efficiency. Anybody who has been involved in a construction project will know that there are 101 things that can push up the cost or throw out the timetable. The result is that more money has to be diverted away from patient care. The PFI allows those risks to be reduced and to be transferred to a private partner.

Since 1992, the PFI has taken root with the establishment of the PFI database in the health service and the requirement that all capital projects be tested to determine their potential for private sector input. The database significantly speeds up the process of matching NHS and private sector organisations with mutual interests, as well as providing a much wider range of potential partners from which a trust can choose. It also allows trusts to draw on the experiences of others in the NHS who have dealt with the private sector, to ensure that their knowledge and expertise are shared.

Already, considerable interest has been revealed and a number of projects are up and running. At its most exciting, the PFI allows the provision for NHS trusts of complete new hospitals, or significant parts of hospitals, funded by the private sector. But opportunities for private sector involvement in health care are by no means limited to the financing of capital-intensive hospital building projects. Indeed, a report commissioned last year by the London Implementation Group recommended that the only way to get privately financed primary health care centres built quickly in inner London would be to allow private health providers to both build and operate them.

In the first instance, trusts may concentrate on those assets and services that are not core functions, such as car parking, waste incineration, energy management, patient accommodation and hotel services, but other schemes may involve direct patient services that carry a risk of uncertain revenue streams, such as dialysis, day surgery and domiciliary services. The past three years have seen a gathering momentum so that, having started at the back of the field, the NHS is now out in front in making use of the PFI. So far, 45 PFI projects have been approved by the NHS executive, with a total capital value of more than £160 million. However, by the end of next year projects worth more than £1 billion will have come forward for assessment and approval.

Under this Government, an enormous amount is being spent on the health service—not just in current spending on patient care, but on capital projects as well. My own constituency is served by two general hospitals, each of which is seeing substantial investment in the expansion of facilities. My constituents in Maldon are served by Broomfield hospital in Chelmsford. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) in the Chamber. He, too, takes a close interest in the progress of that hospital. When he and I visited it recently, we saw that work had just started on a £25 million development. This will include six new theatres, a 20-bed burns unit with its own operating theatre, a 20-bed children's ward and six adult wards for plastic surgery, orthopaedic and rheumatology services, not to mention a new pharmacy, a new hydrotherapy pool and a new medical records library.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) referred to the Governments's hospital building programme as castles in the air. Those projects are no castles in the air—they are in train and will soon be available for patient care. When it is completed in two years' time, clinical space at Broomfield will be increased by more than 50 per cent.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not doubt what the hon. Gentleman says. My brother, who is his constituent, will no doubt be grateful for the hon. Gentleman's work. However, can he say with his hand on his heart that he has been shown evidence to prove that over the whole of the costing and the payback of the project—or any other project—it is unarguably considerably cheaper than any other route that might have been followed?

Mr. Whittingdale: I am interested to learn that the hon. Gentleman's brother is my constituent. I shall regard it as a specific challenge to persuade him to vote for me. I would be happy to have greater analysis. I believe that the private sector is capable of building and running hospitals more cheaply than the public sector. There is already some evidence to support that. However, it is early days with the PFI and I should be happy to see more work done to try to establish the precise facts. We are still in the early stages of private sector involvement in the building of hospitals for the NHS. I hope that there will be greater analysis in the coming months. I believe that it will show that the private sector is capable of building hospitals more cheaply and efficiently than the NHS.

It is not only my Maldon constituents who are benefiting from new capital facilities in the NHS. At Colchester general hospital, which covers the other end of my constituency—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I must reiterate a point that I made earlier: hon. Members' remarks must be related to the Bill and not be simply a general survey of the NHS in an hon. Member's constituency.

Mr. Whittingdale: I entirely take that point, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, at Colchester general hospital in particular, it is the PFI that allows the project to go ahead and therefore benefit my constituents in future. Without the provisions of the Bill, I believe that there would be a threat to the continued success of the PFI, which then might result in such projects not proceeding.

At Colchester general hospital, work is far advanced on a new obstetrics, gynaecology and orthopaedics unit. The next part of the £30 million development programme is

[Mr. Whittingdale]

the re-provision of acute care for the elderly and rehabilitation facilities. That is being undertaken under the PFI at a cost of about £9 million. It should be in place next year. In due course, we can also look forward to a brand new cancer unit in Colchester.

For years, my constituents have lost out because resources have been sucked away from north Essex and into London. As a result, we have suffered from some of the longest waiting lists in the country. At last, that problem is now being addressed and this year the North Essex health authority has been given a £11.5 million increase over and above inflation. However, the real proof of the Government's commitment to the NHS in north Essex is the creation of, in effect, two new hospitals in Colchester and Chelmsford.

Despite the enormous amounts that are being devoted to health care, demand for new facilities is growing continuously. Improvements in medical technology and increasing demand for health care from an aging population mean that resources will always be under pressure—and when budgets are squeezed, it is usually the capital programme that bears the brunt. The PFI can increasingly relieve the NHS of the burden of capital expenditure. This Bill, by clarifying the legal and constitutional status of NHS trusts, will remove one of the last inhibiting factors which may hold back private investors from taking advantage of the PFI.

What is extraordinary is the attitude of the Opposition to the Bill. In the past, they have said that they support the use of private finance for public sector projects. Indeed, as we have heard, they have even attempted to claim that they originally suggested it. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is on record as saying that they have supported the PFI and, in many ways, have been advocating it. It therefore comes as something of a surprise to find that they are opposing the Bill.

The hon. Member for Peckham may not have caught up with the policy of her own party. Like the internal market, the purchaser-provider split, trust hospitals and, apparently, even general practitioner fundholding, she has not realised that it is another area where the Labour party is being forced to muzzle its previous opposition because of the obvious success of and support for those policies. It is certainly possible that she may not have understood the evolution in Labour party thinking, for on the very same day as her leader was expressing his support for the PFI, she was on the "Today" programme saying that the PFI was a new trick to privatise the NHS.

As is the case in so many other areas, the Labour party is in a state of total confusion: it knows that the public finance initiative is working, but it cannot bring itself to say so. The Labour party's ideology prevents it from admitting that the private sector is ever capable of doing things better than the public sector. We are entitled to know whether the Labour party would abandon the PFI, and stop the construction of the hospitals and the facilities that are being built by the PFI. Would the Labour party spend taxpayers' money to replace the investment which is now being financed by the private sector? What is the price tag on its ideological hostility? We have not received any answers to these questions during the debate.

The Bill is a sensible measure: it will ensure that the national health service continues to meet its debts, it will reinforce the confidence of private investors to participate in NHS capital projects and it will allow the PFI to continue to help us build an even better health service.

7.20 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) obviously did not listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) when she addressed the House and explained how the Labour party looks upon the public finance initiative programme, in this instance involving the national health service. My hon. Friend made it clear that the Labour party believes in a partnership arrangement between the public sector and the private sector.

The fact that there is no partnership arrangement with the PFI in the national health service makes us suspicious of what the Government plan. Conservative Members have said that they agree that the financiers should design, plan, build and run the hospitals. If that is not privatisation by the back door, what do Conservative Members require to prove to them that this is a privatisation of the national health service?

I draw hon. Members' attention to why I requested to speak in the debate. The Bill is of paramount interest to my constituents, in particular, and to the people of the Wakefield district, in general. Pinderfields general hospital, in Wakefield, is in my constituency. The doctors, the nurses and the support staff of the hospital are dedicated to the service that they provide and they deserve more help from the Department of Health.

I could have included the chief executive in the list of dedicated people at Pinderfields general hospital, but he left his post on Friday last week. I understand that the director of medical services is currently acting as the chief executive, in addition to performing his normal duties. The director was due to retire in July, but he has agreed to continue to work for a further 18 months, if required.

We are witnessing a further chapter in the Pinderfields scenario—a scenario that has continued for a considerable amount of time. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), when he replies to the debate, can shed some light on what is taking place in Pinderfields general hospital trust.

I draw hon. Members' attention to some of the conditions under which the staff of Pinderfields must work and under which patients receive treatment. If there were a transfer of residual liabilities, a large area of Pinderfields general hospital would be worth very little. A number of the wards at Pinderfields general hospital were provided in 1940 for the wounded personnel of Her Majesty's forces. Approximately 30 temporary buildings were put into place as a provisional hospital—at that time, they were called the huts. The estimated life of the huts—with care, attention and maintenance—was 25 years. Many of the huts are still providing places for patients: 56 years after they were built and more than 30 years after what was estimated to be their useful life.

In 1949, I spent three months in H ward of the hospital because of an accident in the mining industry. At that time, the wards were well maintained, clean and well serviced. They fulfilled a useful purpose. Those wards are now residual liabilities. Over the past 20 years many

promises have been made on the provision of a new hospital on the Pinderfields site to replace the 56-year-old temporary buildings.

A great deal of money has been spent trying to keep the huts at a standard fit for people to receive treatment and for people to work. They have had to make do and mend. On a number of occasions, we have been promised a new hospital, but, as yet, no provision has been made. The huts are built on a gradient and transferring patients on chairs and on trolleys can be a task. This is part of the legacy of the development that took place almost 60 years ago.

A new hospital is needed at Pinderfields. Additions have been made to the general hospital in the form of a new accident and emergency unit, and maternity facilities were transferred from Manygates health clinic in Wakefield. We have been told that there could be further transfers of that maternity service away from Wakefield. This issue is causing great concern to many of my constituents and to people in the Wakefield area in general. The accident and emergency unit and the maternity unit rely on some of the old premises to which I have referred.

Wakefield district is served by two general hospitals: Pinderfields and Pontefract. The latter is currently performing well, and it is fulfilling a most demanding and useful purpose. A few years ago there were eight to 10 hospitals in the Wakefield area, but now there are only two. Last year it was suggested that a new hospital could be built on a greenfield site to replace the existing two hospitals. That suggestion was dropped as a result of pressures from local people—the indigenous population—because they could see problems with closing the two hospitals and with the siting of a new hospital.

We have been advised that at Pinderfields general hospital there will be a £60 million replacement of the old huts and new buildings will supplement the existing and traditional buildings. We have also been advised that between £9 million and £12 million will be spent on Pontefract general hospital. Who will provide the capital? The Government say that it must come from the private finance initiative—and that is why we have this Bill.

We have been informed that the private sector will not sign contracts because of the existing laws. As has been pointed out by the Secretary of State and by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham, under the law as it now stands, when a trust ceases to exist the Secretary of State need not accept the liabilities of the failed trust, including any liabilities under the PFI contracts. The Bill will resolve the problem of the private sector, but it will create impossible problems for the public sector—in this case, the national health service. It requires the Secretary of State to stand behind liabilities over which he has no control, which may total £5 billion, although we have heard that the figure might increase to £10 billion. That is the magnitude of the problem underlying the assurances that the Bill would give the private sector.

Pinderfields Hospital NHS trust wishes to enter into a PFI contract to build the new hospital. I ask the Secretary of State or the Minister, what is our chance of having a new hospital in the Wakefield area? Too many broken promises have been made, and there is little hope of new facilities.

What will the PFI partner demand from the hospital trust? Will the Secretary of State ensure that the PFI benefactor will not demand to be responsible for employing cleaners, for heating supplies and for the back-up services and responsibilities of the new hospital? We are informed that there might be demands in the PFI agreement for the PFI to engage people and run the hospital as an agent on behalf of the trust.

May we have clear, decisive answers to my questions and those asked by other Opposition Members? When can we have a new hospital, and will it be run and administered by the national health service with no strings attached to the PFI agreement?

The position in Pinderfields and in Wakefield is unusual because the Pinderfields site covers a substantial tract of land, owned by the trust, which could be developed for housing and commercial undertakings and is of value—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I have listened attentively to the hon. Gentleman. This is a Bill about the totality of the PFI and the covering of potential debts. It is not appropriate to go into the detail of the landholdings of a particular hospital.

Mr. O'Brien: I was arguing that the liabilities mentioned in the Bill include liabilities that are of value to the PFI developer. That aspect of PFI development worries many people, because there are assets that might influence an agreement.

On that site is the old Stanley Royd hospital, which would be included under the heading of liabilities in the Bill but is a valuable area of land and buildings. If that is included in the liabilities, it will be a substantial incentive to the PFI partner. I draw attention to that background because, if that area were of value and were valued, the PFI would make little effort to raise money because the money would be there in buildings and land, which are now available for disposal.

Why do we need a PFI in the Pontefract and Wakefield area when all those "liabilities" that are really assets are available to the NHS? Why do we need a private sector partner when the NHS has those valuable assets at its disposal? Who are the people in the NHS and the trusts, representing the people of Wakefield, who would offer our hospital services to private money-lenders when valuable public assets are available?

The PFI is privatisation in the form in which it has been presented tonight, and the Bill is intended to prop up the private sector. Why must we proceed down that road?

At present, we have two trusts and two hospitals. We are told that the two trusts will merge into one—each trust will cease to operate and a new one will be created. Problems are inherent in such an arrangement. There is much suspicion about the proposal. We are told that there will be a three-month consultation process before the new trust can be formed.

I draw the Minister's attention to a letter that was sent to the Secretary of State by the chairman of Wakefield community health council, in which he drew attention to the practices of previous Administrations. He said that members of Wakefield CHC are extremely concerned that promises that were made when previous Administrations were changed have not been fulfilled. The letter explains the anxieties of many people in my constituency—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Unless the CHC especially refers to the Bill, this sort of contribution is not

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

in order in the debate. It is fair enough to use the example of the hospital in the hon. Gentleman's constituency to elucidate the main elements of the Bill, but not just to record what the CHC said on a previous occasion about that development.

Mr. O'Brien: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am drawing attention to the lack of confidence in the consultation procedure that we are advised must be undertaken. If the Secretary of State and the Minister read carefully the letter of 6 March from the chairman of the CHC, they will understand why, in view of what happened previously, people in the Wakefield area are suspicious of the proposals to build a new hospital under the PFI and to change the hospital trusts.

Unless the Minister can give assurances tonight about the issues that I have mentioned on behalf of my constituents and the people who depend on the services of Pinderfields general hospital, and allay their suspicions, we shall not have the confidence that one would expect when debating such a Bill.

Because of the experiences mentioned by the chairman of the CHC and other people in the Wakefield area, I believe that the reasoned amendment tabled in the name of Labour Members should be supported.

7.38 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I apologise to you and to the House for not being in the Chamber for the opening speeches; my parliamentary duties elsewhere, including attendance at a Delegated Legislation Committee, meant that I could not be here.

I am very anxious to speak in the debate because I regard the passage of the Bill as crucial to the interests of my constituents, in bringing about the construction of a new hospital in Worcester. If the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), whose speech was more reasonable than those of some of his colleagues, really wants a new hospital to be built in his constituency soon, as he says, he should reconsider his voting intentions, because a vote for the reasoned amendment and against Second Reading would further delay the hospital's construction. I am anxious to avoid that in my case, and the hon. Gentleman should be anxious to avoid it in his constituency.

It is a shame that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) marred a typically effective and detailed contribution by his extraordinary attack on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. To accuse my right hon. Friend of indolence and ignorance—I believe that those were the words that the hon. Gentleman used—is like accusing the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) of being a member of new Labour, as it is just about as implausible. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman marred his contribution by such comments.

I was also sorry to hear the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) as, in his fine contribution, he said many of the things that I had been hoping to say in my speech. *[Interruption.]* I hear cries from the Opposition Benches that my hon. Friend was reading from a central office brief. I can let Opposition Members into a secret: I have seen that brief and I know that my hon. Friend was not reading from it; he was making his own speech—for which I pay tribute to him.

The Bill is genuinely technical. It is effectively a one-clause Bill for each hon. Member. Clause 1 is for hon. Members from England and Wales; clause 2 is for hon. Members from Scotland; and clause 3 is for hon. Members from Northern Ireland. Each hon. Member regards the Bill with his or her own constituency in mind and sees it as a one-clause Bill. It is almost a two-phrase Bill. Clause 1 states that the Secretary of State

"must exercise his statutory powers to transfer property, rights and liabilities of the body so as to secure that all of its liabilities are dealt with."

The last few words of that phrase,

"so as to secure that all of its liabilities are dealt with",

go to the heart of our consideration of the Bill; they also go to the heart of the future of the PFI in the national health service.

The notes to clauses, which were helpfully provided by the Department of Health, clearly state what the Bill is about. The notes state:

"The policy objective is to ensure that, if a NHS trust is dissolved or a health authority or special health authority abolished, its liabilities are transferred to another specified NHS body, or the Secretary of State. This is to ensure there are no residual liabilities left outstanding. The objective is to assure those who contract with such NHS bodies that liabilities will not be extinguished in the event of a NHS trust, health authority or special health authority ceasing to exist."

The next paragraph of the notes is important:

"To date all liabilities of trusts have been transferred elsewhere on dissolution, and even without this legislation it is most unlikely that the Secretary of State would not do so in future. This change, however, removes all doubt on the matter."

If I understand the Bill correctly, it simply makes it clear that the taxpayer stands, as he or she should, firmly behind all the liabilities of the national health service. To that extent, the Bill should not attract any controversy in the House this evening. What it means in practical terms is tremendously important. It provides the reassurance that is crucial to all those who trade with the NHS, from the smallest retailer—the provider of the odd bit of stationery or greengrocery—to the largest PFI contractor. There will always be someone who is prepared to honour the NHS's side of the contract.

Does it matter whether we pass the Bill? After all, the notes on clauses state that, in practice, all liabilities have so far been transferred elsewhere on dissolution and it is most unlikely that the Secretary of State will do anything different in future. But the Bill matters fundamentally to the future of the PFI, because those who stand behind the PFI contractors—those who will undertake the financing of projects—attach huge importance to the provision. Therefore, it must matter to every hon. Member who cares about the future of the NHS and who shares the vision, which I thought was common across the House, of the need to develop a more effective partnership between the public and private sectors.

What the PFI does—and will be able to do only if the Bill secures its passage—is to provide more capital than would otherwise have been available for the NHS. We can play word games about whether that money is additional to the overall levels of funding, but, ultimately, the Bill will enable an overall increase in the capital schemes in the NHS.

About 25 large-scale NHS/PFI schemes have recently been advertised in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*—all the schemes are worth more than £25 million. I am afraid that I have not done the arithmetic in my head, but the resulting sum of money is clearly large. I am glad to say that one of the schemes that has been advertised in the journal is for the new Worcester district general hospital.

If only half those 25 schemes were to succeed and come to fruition, that would still represent a huge increase in the capital programme of the NHS. That capital programme is significantly higher now than it was when the Government came to power. There has been a huge increase in the capital programme of the NHS, plus massive increases in current expenditure on it—there have been massive real terms increases. I think that I am right in saying that there has been an increase from about 4.7 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1979 to more than 6 per cent. now. The capital programme could be threatened if the Bill did not secure its passage.

The working of the PFI depends on the substantial transfer of risk to the private sector. What sort of risks? The obvious risks are in design and construction, and in the costs associated with the commissioning of any new facility. There are also risks involved in the costs of operating that facility; there is a risk that, during the facility's lifetime, technological obsolescence may occur. All those risks need to be transferred to the private sector as part of the PFI, but the Bill deals with one risk that need not be—and should not and could not be expected to be—transferred to the private sector. If I have understood it correctly, that risk is that the Secretary of State might rob a trust of its hospital and leave all the liabilities behind. That risk would clearly worry any reasonable-minded financier or lawyer.

The Bill is important; an article in today's edition of the *Financial Times* states:

"PFI hopes hinge on emergency bill".

I do not know to what extent it is an emergency Bill, but I agree with the first half of that: PFI hopes do hinge on the Bill. I shall be fair and even-handed; the article states that while some

"analysts are not yet convinced of the long-term viability of PFI in the health sector, most seem to accept Mr. Dorrell's assurances on the bill. Mr. Kingsley Manning, managing director of Newchurch and Co, a consulting firm involved in several health PFI projects, said that the risk transfer in PFI was never meant to refer to trust liabilities."

The article quotes Mr. Manning as saying:

"The risks that the government is attempting to transfer through PFI are those that the private sector operators would be expected to have some control over, like volume, activity and performance . . . The new legislation just puts health in line with other government departments."

It is as simple as that: the Bill simply puts the Department of Health in line with the other Departments of State that use the PFI.

The PFI does not seek to privatise the health service. Opposition Members' attitude to the Bill and the PFI is confusing. I sometimes hear them claim that they invented the PFI and I sometimes hear them seek to undermine it—often on the same day, to different audiences. On 28 November last year, the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), said from the Dispatch Box:

"The PFI is right in principle. We have supported it, and in many ways we have been advocating it."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1077.]

The right hon. Gentleman should let his vote follow his voice and support the Bill this evening—it is crucial to the future of the PFI.

At a conference in London in May last year, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), the deputy leader of the Labour party, said:

"I have long been associated with arguing for public-private partnerships . . . I made the case for private sector involvement in public investment."

However, only four or five weeks later, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said from the Dispatch Box:

"there is growing alarm at the way . . . in which the Government openly use the private finance initiative to privatise core . . . services."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 23.]

Labour Members must make up their minds—and, with respect, they should decide to support the Bill, which will genuinely enhance the future prospects of the PFI. On 18 January, the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) said:

"We do not disagree with the PFI, how could we? It was Labour who first thought of partnerships between the public and private sector".

Perhaps he should have listened to the remarks of his hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) only five days earlier at a conference in Birmingham, when she said:

"I don't call it a Private Finance Initiative. I call it a privatisation initiative."

Labour Members seem to be saying two things but doing only one of them—that seems to sum up their position with regard to the Bill and the PFI.

The Bill is an essential underpinning of the PFI, which is the pragmatic way of introducing partnership into the national health service. The debate so far has focused too much on the issue of cost. Of course cost matters, but the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) seemed to believe that the issue is only about cost. It is not. The benefits include additional capital funding, which will mean more projects overall and better cost control—so there is an element of discipline related to cost. The PFI will reduce the risk for the taxpayer and make better use of existing assets, as the hon. Member for Normanton said. I am sure that some imaginative ideas will come forward as part of the PFI bidding process in the health sector, about how to use the residual assets of NHS trusts.

My constituency case involves three sites, and I believe that the involvement of the private sector will assist us to make good use of them. The private sector will bring a more constructive and entrepreneurial approach to the issue, rather than the old, staid public sector approach. The PFI will shorten construction times by introducing innovations in the way in which hospitals are built. That will bring real benefits. We have seen how, in the Prison Service, private contractors can build more quickly than builders were able to under the old public sector contracts.

There will be innovation in its fullest sense. I have hinted already at innovation in the construction process and at making better use of existing assets. There will be innovation also in service provision. Those benefits could be jeopardised if the Bill did not receive a Second Reading, because the flow of PFI finance to big projects would dry up immediately.

[Mr. Peter Luff]

Much of what I have heard in the debate leads me to believe that Labour Members have reverted to type—to old Labour—in opposing the Bill. The hon. Member for Normanton referred to "private moneylenders"—which is a particularly graphic and vengeful phrase. That old hostility has come through the debate with stark and startling clarity.

The fact that innovation will be put at risk if the Bill does not receive a Second Reading is best illustrated by what is occurring in South Worcestershire. The South Worcestershire community NHS trust has co-operated with a local fitness centre to provide a £250,000 scheme that will benefit the whole community and provide new services and revenue to the trust. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited the facility on Friday last week, and he was deeply impressed by what he saw. If we do not pass the Bill, that scheme—which it is hoped will be replicated throughout the trust area—will face unnecessary difficulties and uncertainty in the future.

The trust has teamed with a health and fitness company to build a new exercise and fitness studio on the hospital site. The company, One-on-One, is working in partnership with the Evesham community hospital to help meet "The Health of the Nation" fitness targets. A press release issued last year states:

"Seven-and-a-half thousand square feet of brand new exercise and fitness studios with the very latest equipment will be ready for use in the autumn . . . But it's the alliance with the hospital that makes the health-promoting difference. Hospital patients will have access to new facilities and the award-winning 'One-on-One' team—they've gained a coveted British Standards/ISO 9002 Award for Quality—will be working as part of a wider NHS team to help persuade people across the Vale"—

that is the Vale of Evesham—

"to become more physically active".

That imaginative partnership scheme is the result not just of a partnership between the public and private sectors—I do not wish to pretend that it is as simple as that. More than one public sector body is involved: the public health department, the district council and the trust have forged an alliance that will benefit my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for South Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer).

That PFI scheme will provide innovative facilities for hospital patients at no cost to the trust. Unless we pass the Bill, innovative schemes such as that—which share risks and benefits between the public and private sectors and which have proved in practice to bring enormous benefits to both parties—will be put at unnecessary risk. I shall not weary you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by listing the services that the scheme will provide.

Mr. Whittingdale: Go on.

Mr. Luff: No, I shall not as that might try your generosity, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some of the schemes are clearly aimed primarily at the private sector aspects of the fitness centre: fitness testing, health and fitness for 50 years plus, sports injury rehabilitation and so on. However, there are some mainstream health facilities, including osteoporosis and arthritis care; respiratory, cardio pulmonary health and fitness and so on. That is the kind of innovation that can flow from the injection of private finance into the NHS, and it will be threatened if the Bill—which goes to the heart of the private finance initiative—does not secure a Second Reading.

The Bill is very important for all those who live in south Worcestershire. The people have campaigned for 30 years for a new hospital to replace the current three sites—one of which is the second oldest site in England where patients are still treated. The British Medical Association was founded on that site in Worcester many years ago. My predecessor, Lord Walker of Worcester, turned the first sod of the new hospital site in August 1993, but nothing has occurred since then. There has been a long battle to persuade the region about the business case for the hospital.

We now face the prospect of an excellent hospital with outstanding core medical facilities and a flexible number of beds. Everyone would benefit from the new facilities that the development would provide. The new Worcester hospital, for which my predecessor and I have campaigned so vigorously, must not falter because of a simple, technical issue that the House can resolve easily. That is why the Bill is important to me, to my constituents and to all those who live in south Worcestershire.

The private finance process is progressing well in Worcestershire: it is an example to other trusts round the country of how to achieve aims quickly and professionally. I am not prepared to let down the trust's hard-working managers and medical staff by allowing a problem at national level to thwart their attempts to advance the scheme quickly.

We face serious issues in creating the right commercial and organisational arrangements between the private sector and the NHS. However, the Bill clears away the main obstacle. There is an excellent team in Worcester, with a new chief executive, which is committed to making the private finance process work. It wants to pioneer a sensible deal that will combine the best of the national health service and the private sector, to bring the sorts of innovations that we have seen in Evesham in the past few months.

The trust has put out invitations to tender to three short-listed consortiums—Laser, Bovis and Bryants—and the bids are due to be received by 10 July this year. If all goes well—if there are no hiccups and the Bill secures its passage—the contracts should be signed this year.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Notwithstanding what the article in the *Financial Times* said this morning, is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Secretary of State told the Treasury Select Committee that the Bill was not needed in order to complete those PFI deals?

Mr. Luff: I am at liberty to disagree with my Front Bench—that is one of the privileges that Back Benchers have. I think that the Bill is important, and that is also the view of those to whom I have spoken in the NHS. They think that their financiers will require the security afforded by the Bill, and I am very happy to take their advice. I shall listen to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I believe that the Bill is important—and my local trust believes that also.

The contracts with the three consortia must be signed and every legal obstacle must be removed from their path. We must provide suitable health care to the people of my

county into the next millennium. Years of waiting can be brought to an end. The medical and clinical staff at the hospital deserve the full support of the House this evening, to ensure that the PFI helps them to deliver the highest-quality treatment for the patients whom they serve.

I looked at the reasoned amendment before the House and I despaired. It rests its case on the suggestion that there will be some

"abuse of the Private Finance Initiative to advance privatisation of the NHS".

That is not how any Conservative Member sees it. We are committed to a public national health service, largely free at the point of delivery. If I thought that the Bill were a back-door route to the privatisation of NHS hospitals, I could not support it this evening. Private finance makes little or no difference to the basis on which health care is provided, but it will improve the quality of care, the range of services that hospitals can offer and the physical condition of hospitals.

Obviously, I hope that the debate will change the minds of Liberal and Labour Members and that the Opposition will be persuaded to drop their reasoned amendment and support the Bill on Second Reading. I want the Bill and I want my hospital, and I believe that the two are closely related. For narrow partisan reasons, I am tempted to hope that the Opposition stick to their guns and vote for the amendment and against Second Reading. If they do, they will have given me a powerful weapon in my county, when I explain what they have done to frustrate the construction of our new hospital.

8.1 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), who spoke for quite some time, did not speak before the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale). He could then have read out the Conservative central office brief and that would have stopped him using his usual tactics for prolonging the debate. They include repeating what others have said, reading out the Bill, its clauses and the notes to the clauses and then speaking at great length about his constituency.

Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members confirmed two of my worst fears about the private finance initiative. First, whatever anyone says, it is in part a substitute for Government funding. It is no longer additional funding. Secondly, it is yet another method of slowly but surely privatising the national health service.

I remain of the view that, as far as possible, the NHS should be provided and financed by Government. That is not always possible. The potatoes are not always provided. To use the same analogy as the Secretary of State, tonight's measure might turn out to be the potato Bill.

It is important that the Government provide as much as possible, otherwise, bit by bit, the national health service is gradually eroded. Every time they erode a little piece, it becomes easier to erode another piece and that leads to the slippery slope, the black-white shift of philosophy whereby what was unacceptable yesterday becomes acceptable today, not because the principle has changed, but because there has been a slow but sure philosophical shift.

Having stated my position, I realise that there are practicalities. We live in the real world, there are constraints on the public sector borrowing requirement and Governments have to take account of such influences as interest rates. Therefore, there may be a case for considering the private finance initiative, provided that it is used in the interests of the health service, the risk is shared and the investment is to the benefit of all.

The more I look at it, the more obvious it becomes that the PFI is biased against the national health service and protects the private sector. The Bill completely removes all substantial risk from the private financier and places the liability back in our hands. It makes it easy for the private sector to become involved because there is no risk. The Bill gives what is virtually a carte blanche guarantee to the private sector. Trusts will be able to borrow money from the private sector and the Government will pick up the liability. I cannot see how that will not be set against the PSBR.

I understand that parts of the private finance initiative will not be set against the public sector borrowing requirement, but given the contents of the Bill and the projects that have been mentioned, I cannot understand how the Secretary of State can accept completely free and open liability for money borrowed by trusts through the PFI without setting it against the public sector borrowing requirement. Therefore, the private sector would incur no risk.

The hon. Member for Worcester said that some risks would be incurred. Those risks have been set out before, but they are minimal. First, there is a delivery risk. Contractors would be responsible for every aspect of establishing the service on time. Any contractor who is worried about delivering on time should not be in business. Secondly, there is volume risk, whereby the contractor cannot expect a guaranteed income. That is part of business. Even potato producers do not expect a guaranteed volume and they also incur a delivery risk. Thirdly, there are obsolescence risks. There is even a potential obsolescence risk with potatoes. Finally, there are economic risks, as contractors are no longer protected by inflation indexed payments. Those risks are part of normal contractual arrangements. They are normal business risks that anyone would expect.

The Bill does not seek to protect risks that anyone in business would expect. It seeks to protect almost open-ended liabilities incurred by trusts. They are not payments out of the current account; they are capital risks that will have to be set against the public sector borrowing requirement.

The PFI has a long history. As the hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon, who read the Conservative central office brief, will know, it stems from the Ryrie rules that were established by the National Economic Development Council in 1981. They were designed to introduce private finance into nationalised industries, but they were very strictly drawn. They allowed public finance only if it was the cheapest option and the private sector carried the full risk. Those were two important criteria, and the Bill removes one of them. They were not viable because the private sector would not accept them on that basis, therefore they were amended over the years and eventually dropped.

[Mr. Sam Galbraith]

They were replaced by the private finance initiative that was introduced in 1992 by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). He was quoted as saying that its purpose was

"to remove the unnecessary obstacles to private sector investment in Britain's infrastructure."

He made sure that it was biased in favour of the private sector and that any risks would fall on the Government. That is what the Bill does.

The PFI comprises a number of features, including the possible involvement of leasing arrangements. As long as a project was shown to be profitable, it could go ahead without having to be compared with similar public sector activity, but there had to be a sensible transfer of risk. It was reiterated that the private sector must genuinely assume the risk. That proved to be unworkable, because the private sector would not accept the risk, so the Bill removes all risk from the private sector and places it once again with the Government and the taxpayer.

The private sector will fail to realise the potential. Conservative Members who made pleas for their constituencies and said that the PFI is the way forward have false hopes, as do the Government. The only way that they can succeed is if there is no risk to the private sector—I do not believe that the Treasury or any Government who believe in prudent finance could allow that to continue.

The PFI is more costly than the public sector. We all know that it costs the private sector more to raise finance than it does the Government, at 3 per cent. to 4 per cent. The only way in which that money can be recouped is by leasing charges or—as increasingly happens, and this is where the PFI produces problems—support services, leading eventually to medical services. In other words, that means the privatisation of the NHS, which is the Government's long-term aim.

Mr. Peter Puplett, a former economist with Tarmac, said about any charge:

"On the one hand, it could be set too low and the private sector would not find it viable to finance the project. On the other, it could prove too high and the project would become a licence to print money. The latter risk is something feared by Treasury officials and ministers alike. It is the hidden handicap of the PFI and explains why so little progress has been made."

In other words, the Government cannot win—particularly if the Bill is passed. Yes, there are short-term advantages from the PFI and yes, immediate capital outlay is avoided—but the cost over the years, because of the charges inherent in the initiative, mean that in the long term, the PFI will be much more expensive. We will spend the rest of our lives paying for that which we apparently get for nothing today.

The PFI has no ability to establish priorities as to where the money goes, and with that goes a locked-in lack of flexibility. The Minister of State, Scottish Office who is on the Treasury Bench is responsible for the health service in Scotland, so he knows that Greater Glasgow health board leased under an initiative a large central office for its administrative services. Subsequently, the board's structure changed and evolution came about, and it no longer needed that office. Nevertheless, the board is locked into a 99-year lease, at massive cost, and it cannot get rid of that liability. The contractor does not mind because it is getting the money. The liability has fallen back on us.

A company tamed Takare in Glasgow looks after the care of the elderly. That model is no longer appropriate and we want to change it, but we are locked into a 15-year agreement under a PFI. Flexibility has been lost, charges have been increased and we are heading slowly but inexorably towards privatisation.

The Secretary of State for Health has said that there will be no PFI in the clinical services. He tempered that today, saying that there will be no PFI where that is not wanted. We all remember the reassurance that hospitals would not be allowed to opt out to become trusts without clinical approval. That was all nonsense. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) knows that, despite the Secretary of State's remarks in this Parliament, the Scottish Office is seeking to involve private finance in not just building Stonehaven hospital and running the catering, portering and other services but in running every part of the clinical services. That is the reality in Scotland at present, and that is the PFI's hidden agenda.

The private finance initiative will not realise the hopes and dreams of Conservative Members in terms of new hospitals. It will produce long-term costs and lead slowly but inexorably towards privatisation of the NHS. For that reason, we are right to be wary of the PFI and to vote for the reasoned amendment.

8.14 pm

Mr. David Ashby (North-West Leicestershire): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), but his speech was typical of new Labour—full of sound and fury. The hon. Gentleman made all sorts of statements about the Bill being no good, but he gave no reasons and offered no sensible alternatives. That also is typical of the Labour party, which is always ready to oppose a measure but never seems able to offer anything constructive in its place.

Mr. Martlew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashby: No, I am going on for the moment. I have just started.

I am grateful to be called today because I want to show that I may be down but I am not out.

I am astounded that the Bill is being opposed because it is a simple measure to ensure only an organisation to honour the national health service side of contracts, be what may. It does not demand much more than that, in providing confidence in the public sector. The Opposition's arguments would be much better put in Committee than now, so why are they opposing the Second Reading of this simple Bill?

I am reminded of a constituent who came to my surgery three or four weeks ago, who had experienced some trouble with a double glazing company. I will not give its real name but will call it Parliamentary Double Glazing. My constituent had paid a deposit and then, horror of horrors, he discovered that the firm had gone into liquidation. He submitted a claim to the receiver, but was told, "Sorry, there's no money." Then my constituent found that Parliamentary Double Glazing remained in

business, but was renamed Parliamentary Double Glazing Ltd. Mark 2. Then there will be mark 3 and mark 4. That experience gave my constituent no confidence in buying double glazing at all, let alone from Parliamentary Double Glazing. We have all heard of similar experiences in our surgeries.

What happens if trusts end and there are contracts to be fulfilled? Will there be nobody to honour those contracts and nobody to pay? Are we to have the National Health Service Parliamentary Double Glazing Ltd? Is that what we want? The Bill is highly technical and provides for the situation that I described. Why are the Opposition so keen to oppose it?

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) used a large number of quotations, starting with the Leader of the Opposition saying that the PFI is right in principle, then the great whopper from the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) that Labour had first thought of partnerships between the public and private sectors. There is no truth in that. There have been partnerships between those sectors from Conservative Governments for many a long day—but Labour likes, as always, to claim Conservative policies as its own. The Labour party loves to do that and it does it all the time, but the public will see through it.

The Labour party is like the emperor with his new clothes. But the problem is that the Labour party's background and credentials are completely different to ours. The Leader of the Opposition wears his new clothes. He came from Islington and was a member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and a left-winger so he is wearing new clothes. What is underneath the new clothes? The same body is still underneath. That is transparent, and exactly the same applies to the Labour party and to the speech by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith).

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) said that public assets would be used by private money lenders. We have also heard that the Bill would mean privatisation, but that does not square at all with the Labour party's argument that it is in favour of the PFI. It has said that it does not disagree with the PFI and has even claimed that it thought of partnerships between the public and private sectors.

There are two sides in the Labour party and that is why it opposes the Bill. There has been no change at all in the party. Behind new Labour, there is a whole army that would not, under any circumstances, want the private sector to help any public sector body, be it the health service or any other body. In the constituencies, there is a bigger army behind the wafer-thin new Labour. Underneath it all is old Labour.

I cannot help feeling—I think that many people agree—that the real truth about the Labour party is that it does not want the national health service to succeed. It wants to be able to say that the NHS failed under the Conservatives, when it has been a great success story. The Labour party wants to undermine absolutely everything that we are doing. Despite everything Opposition Members have said, they want to see the PFI fail. Tonight, the Labour party is pandering to its left wing, and that is why it is opposing the Bill.

New Labour is like my house in my constituency; it has an 1820 front, but behind the front it is 200 years old. Labour Members put up a front, but behind it the house that they live in is the house of Keir Hardie and the unions, which brought so much disaster and unhappiness to this country. Disaster was caused by the over-powerful unions, especially in the national health service. The Labour party wants to return to its old ways. It pays only lip service to the direction in which we have gone.

I am delighted to speak in this debate because I, like others who are middle aged or entering into old age, use the health service more and more. My use of the health service has been rather public, I fear, and most people have read about it in the gutter newspapers. I use the national health service although I have BUPA. The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden knows more about the gynaecological side than the male side—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must relate his comments to the specific Bill before us or to the reasoned amendment.

Mr. Ashby: I hope that I have related my comments so far to the Bill.

I am proud of the NHS, because it is very good. I am proud about the direction in which the NHS has gone. I have always felt that private sector initiatives can be used by the NHS for the benefit of patients. That is the direction in which we should go, at our best and at our wisest. There is no demon in privatisation, although the Opposition would like to say that there is. What is good enough for the private sector is always good enough for the public sector and there is much to be gained from the private sector which would benefit the public sector.

The Labour party is anxious to build a wall between the public and private sectors. It pretends that they do not exist and fights any intrusion by the private sector, however good, into any of our institutions. The Labour party frightens the public about the national health service itself, but it also tries to frighten the public about private participation in the national health service.

The Bill is meant to give a morale boost to the private sector, yet it is opposed. We will not obtain private sector participation unless support is given to it. The private sector has to know that if it participates, it will not face bills that it should never have to face. The Bill would give the private sector a confidence that it should have.

It is a myth that the private finance initiative leads to delays. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is a hard-working constituency Member in Leicestershire. I have known him for a long time and part of my constituency was in his constituency before the boundary changes in 1983. When I was selected, I consulted my right hon. Friend to find out what was happening and I asked him especially about the local national health service. We have done especially well. We have the new Glenfield hospital and various other hospitals in the centre of Leicester, but there were enormous delays in planning and financing those hospitals. It was a long time before we got the Glenfield hospital, even though I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State worked hard to try to push the new hospital through.

The situation would be very different today. The problems started in 1979 because so many hospitals were closed by the Labour party and there were long delays in building new hospitals. As soon as the Conservative Government came to power, many new hospitals were

[Mr. Ashby]

built and new initiatives took place. If the PFI had been in place, those schemes could have come on much more quickly and we would have had more hospitals which would have been more successful.

A private sector of a sort has been involved in hospital building for some time. I have a marvellous community hospital in Coalville. Before the war, the local people started to collect for their community hospital. After the war, they collected harder, and then the project died away a little. Then there was a tremendous burst of energy and a great collection took place for the community hospital in Coalville. The people were able to participate, by their charitable efforts, in the building of the hospital. Such participation by the private sector in financing a community hospital gives the people involved a sense of belonging. After all, the private sector possesses a great deal of expertise and can do a great deal to help the public sector with its building programmes.

Another charge levelled at the Government is that no new money is forthcoming. The Government also stand charged—without a shred of evidence—of having cut funding for the NHS. We all know that that is not true. Changes in the health service and in the sort of provision of which it is capable have led to greater expenditure. We should always remember that all capital expenditure has a revenue implication, however.

We must make use of the best in the private sector. This Bill fulfils all that I hope for. I look forward to the legislation supporting the private sector in this initiative, and to even greater future initiatives that will allow the health service to expand, to give of its best and to continue to be efficient. The NHS is the jewel in our crown, and I am extremely proud of it. *[Interruption.]* I cannot hear a word of what the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden is saying, so I shall take no notice of it.

The Conservative period in government has resulted in a vastly improved national health service. The Bill does everything possible to further that improvement.

8.32 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I am glad to see the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Ashby) in his place. It must have taken some courage for him to come to make a speech today, although I suspect it was not his best ever. When Conservatives read it in years to come, they may realise that they were wrong about the PFI. I am compelled to speak this evening because of the constituency problems created for my electors by the PFI and by measures such as this Bill.

There is no doubt that the Bill is about removing the risk from private companies, thereby allowing them to own our hospitals with no fear of being out of pocket. The original Treasury rules required schemes funded under the PFI to involve a genuine transfer of risk to the private sector so as to justify the rate of return that might be generated. The Bill gets rid of that risk, leaving just a higher rate of return.

The Bill has become necessary because the private finance initiative has fallen at the first hurdle. The banks have decided that they are not prepared to take the risk, while the Minister has decided that he cannot afford the political embarrassment of letting the PFI fall by the wayside.

The failure of the PFI is graphically illustrated in Carlisle. It is just one in a long list of broken Government promises about the development of our district general hospital, Cumberland infirmary. The redevelopment of that infirmary began in 1968 under a Labour Government, and the first phase was completed in 1974 under another Labour Government. Next, there were various false starts, but approval was finally given for phase 2 in 1988, under the old capital allocation rules. The scheme was worked up and a start date was sought, but in September 1992 the Carlisle hospitals, under pressure from the Government, decided to become a trust. When they looked at the figures, however, they decided that the trust would not be viable if it went ahead with the building scheme—so Government dogma got in the way and the scheme was abandoned.

The decision to abort the scheme was taken in the very week the tender was due to go out, so there was great anger in my constituency. The new trust promised to set about developing another scheme, and came up with one which, the trust claimed, would provide fewer beds but would achieve the same objective and bring in savings of nearly £2 million a year if the buildings went up on the same site. Much time and public money were expended; in fact, the chief executive has quoted a figure of £400,000 spent on fees to get the new scheme in place.

The trust's scheme was finalised in the summer of 1994. There followed another body blow: the Government stepped in and said that the scheme should be put through the PFI. The trust argued that it should go ahead under the old scheme, because that was ready. Alternatively, it should be fast-tracked. The Government, however, maintained that the PFI would not delay the scheme long—that it would take five or six months to get it through the system.

It took six months just to place the advertisement in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, a necessary part of the legal preparations. So six months were lost to bureaucracy.

Next, hundreds of companies applied. They were sifted down to 16, and a great deal of work went into producing a short-list of three by 9 May 1995. This was heralded as a great victory for the PFI. On 5 September, a short press release was issued by the Carlisle Hospitals NHS trust, saying that two of the companies had pulled out. That left a short-list of one; logic dictates that there is not much competition in such circumstances. The PF initiative should have been aborted, and the public money that the Government had once promised should have been provided to build the hospital.

The Government insisted that the disciplines of the market place meant that a short-list of one was acceptable. I understand that one of the subsidiaries of the shortlisted company is being investigated by the Ministry of Defence and the police for fraud. I refer to AMEC. Fears are growing that, because AMEC is the only bidder, costs will escalate and the millions of pounds that were to be saved by putting the facilities on one site will not materialise. There could even be extra costs. I want to know from the Minister whether, if extra costs are involved, the Government will meet them—or will they have to come out of patient care? That would be wholly unacceptable.

I understand that, although there has been no official announcement, AMEC wants to run the portering, the catering, security, car parking and laundry services. It is

also keenly interested—I bet it is—in running the medical records department. But the consultants in the hospital are opposed to that. There is a great deal of disquiet about the PFI among them, and they find themselves in a dilemma. They need the new hospital. They need the new facilities, but they do not want private sector involvement. One consultant said that it does not matter how good the surgeons are; if the laundry does not work and there are no sheets, one cannot do any operations. Another surgeon said:

"You can't expect a private company who has so much at stake in the hospital not to try to put profit before patient care".

Consultants are in that dilemma. To some extent, many of us who have been promised new hospitals are in a dilemma: we do not want PFI, but we do not want our hospital projects delayed.

During a recent takeover bid for AMEC by Kvaerner, a Norwegian company, I met, on 11 December last year, the managing directors of both companies. I was able to get a commitment from AMEC that if it did get the scheme and took over some of the services, it would recognise a trade union. I had great difficulty explaining PFI to the Norwegian managing director of Kvaerner. He said, "We have done some privatisation in Norway, but we haven't stooped to selling off the hospitals yet." As it happened, AMEC beat off Kvaerner, which, I understand, is trying to take over Trafalgar House, but that is a different story.

The plans under consideration are creating great concern, because one of the options is to reduce the number of beds in Carlisle to less than what many of us think is necessary to provide adequate cover, especially in times of emergency, of epidemics. In the winter, there are many cases of flu and of people going into hospital. This year, there are 556 beds in Carlisle at our three sites, but the demand was such that we had to open up another ward. I understand that the bed numbers for the single-site hospital—there will be no more beds—will be 100 fewer than that total. Although I appreciate the growth of day surgery—I recently benefited from day surgery, and I suspect that, with a hernia, I would not have been able to stand for as long—we are greatly afraid. We are worried that we will get the worst of both worlds—that we will get the finance for the new hospital but that it will be decided that we cannot close the old city general, which will mean that there will be two sites, and that one hospital will be the workshop. That would be most unsatisfactory and most uneconomic from all points of view.

One forgets that when we are talking about delays in hospital provision we are talking about patient care, and, sometimes, unnecessary deaths; unfortunately, that is what happens in Carlisle. I do not believe in shroud waving, as it has no effect in this place, but the reality is that we have a problem in Carlisle with our maternity service, which is on the other side of the city from where the paediatricians are based. A report investigated the high number of perinatal mortalities in east Cumbria. On a regional basis, between 1988 and 1992, we should have had 55 deaths; we had 75.

In the northern region, my area is not one of particular deprivation, so the number of deaths should have been below the regional average, but that did not happen. One of the reasons given for that is that the paediatricians could not get across the city in time to treat sick babies. It was estimated, not by me but by the director in charge of community services in east Cumbria, that every year there are one or two unnecessary deaths of babies in Carlisle because of that. It has not been mentioned often enough today, but the delay in the provision of facilities costs lives, and PFI in my constituency has delayed our scheme by at least two years.

I have been involved in the health service in Cumbria for many years. For a short time, until we had a Conservative Government in 1979, I was chairman of the health authority. We have been fighting for better provision. I have said all along that I will not believe that we will get a new hospital until I see them lay the first bricks. In my case and, I suspect, in many others in the rest of the country, PFI will delay. It will be a sham. It will raise people's expectations, and at the end of the day the money will not be there. The bankers will not be able to finance it and the Government will not be able to afford the long-term costs. That is why I shall be voting for the reasoned amendment.

8.45 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), who speaks with real experience, having been chairman of his local health authority in previous years. I understand the frustrations that he voiced about the future of the hospital in his constituency. At times, I have done the same in the House for my constituency of Dartford. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) made a speech earlier—I was not able to hear it—and gave an account of the progress that we intend to make, and will make, in the provision of a new district general hospital in Dartford in the early part of next year.

Unlike the hon. Member for Carlisle, I prefer to look down the telescope the other way round. Whereas he looks from the big end down to the small, I look from the small end down to the big. A pessimist says that the bottle is half empty. An optimist says that the bottle is half full. Although we might have cause to unite, in the context of the Bill, on some manifestations of health service provision in the past few years, we must differ, in that the hon. Gentleman came to bury his health trust, whereas I come here to praise mine.

In the context of PFI, my hon. Friend the Minister will remember an Adjournment debate of 11 January this year, which I inspired, applied for and successfully obtained, on hospital provision in north-west Kent. My hon. Friend was able to tell the House on that occasion that my local health trust treated about 164,000 patients in 1994-95 and that it is expected that it will treat a further 10 per cent. in the present year. In addition, it achieved an impressive 5-star ranking in 1994-95 in the context of NHS performance tables.

As to where we see the PFI going, I can give an account of the delays, tribulations and frustrations in Dartford and Gravesham over the years, but I see the PFI as a real way forward—not a delaying or blocking mechanism or an impediment to provision but, rather, opening up and clearing the way. The window of opportunity, which we hear so often as a cliché, is real in the sense that my constituents can now look forward—if the process continues at the speed, and with the rigour and robustness we have seen hitherto—to the new district hospital being started in the early part of 1997.

[Mr. Bob Dunn]

The hon. Member for Carlisle gave an historical and chronological account of events in Carlisle. I shall do the same for Dartford, but not at great length. In June 1995, my local trust was granted approval to test the scheme, to provide a new general hospital under the PFI process. It advertised the scheme quite quickly in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. On 5 September, following a pre-qualification exercise, four consortia, representing some big household names, were selected, and, of course, the process goes on. An important element in the short Adjournment debate on 11 January was that my hon. Friend the Minister was able to say:

"The overall process is as short and efficient as it can be, consistent with ensuring that value for money and the requirements of public accountability are achieved. If all goes to plan, building work should begin during the first half of 1997—that is the present supposition."

My hon. Friend the Minister went on:

"I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford that the project has the full support of all concerned—at authority level, regional level, NHS executive level and Government level. I can assure him also that the evaluation will be carried out as speedily as possible in Whitehall, so there will be no delays at our end."—[*Official Report*, 11 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 388-89.]

This important legislation rounds off the process for those from the private sector who wish to enter into partnership with the health trust in the construction of hospital facilities and the provision of care services so essential in modern society. It will show them that there is a guarantee, support, an attitude of mind within Government, so that when and if existing health boards and trusts are wound up, there will be a commitment to fund the liabilities from the NHS side. This is important in the concept of partnership.

We have heard something tonight, and we will need to hear a little more, about where the Opposition stand in their support for the PFI. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) tried but failed. She told the House that the Labour party supported the PFI but then proceeded to give reasons why she did not.

We have on public record the statement made by the Leader of the official Opposition on 4 October 1994 in a speech to his party conference. He said:

"We would get public and private finance working together in transport, in housing, in capital projects, in health and education."

A little later, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), a former deputy leader of the Labour party, disagreed and said:

"Market testing represents creeping privatisation. As does the Private Finance Initiative."

The present deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), speaking at a London conference on 31 May 1995, said:

"I have long been associated with arguing for public-private partnerships".

That is true. As shadow transport spokesman, he made that point during many debates. At that speech in London, he went on to say:

"I made the case for private sector involvement in public investment."

Exactly so. The Opposition must decide what they stand for and give tonight an outright declaration of their support for the PFI as we have determined it in the context of the NHS.

The great benefit to the NHS of the PFI is that such private capital is additional to that which can be obtained from public funding sources. That is the most important point to be made in the debate. In the context of the PFI, we are talking about additional funds, not limiting but enhancing and improving public funding of the NHS.

I welcome the Bill. It is short compared with many that I have seen in my time. It is necessary. It gives undertakings, commitment and loyalty. I hope that Opposition Members will seriously think about how they vote tonight, and not make it a left-right, Opposition-Government matter, but join Conservative Members in the Lobby tonight. I give up on the hon. Member for Peckham, because she is wholly without commitment in everything that she says and does, but there are other Opposition Members who are much clearer in their philosophy and I invite them to join us in the Lobby this evening.

8.53 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I begin by apologising to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the House for not being present at the beginning of the debate, but I was serving on Committees elsewhere in the House.

I support the Opposition amendment which sets out in crystal clear terms the problems with the Bill. The problem with the private finance initiative in the major hospital projects on which Conservative Members have concentrated today is that it does not really bring in any significant new money to those projects, but rather postpones payment of the bills.

In the case of a new toll bridge, for example, where a new source of revenue is created in the form of tolls, the PFI releases new capital from the private sector, which is additional and which can be used for constructing the bridge. But in the end, a hospital is all paid for out of taxation, and the rate of interest on the capital involved, because it comes from the private sector, is greater than it would be for a publicly financed project. Therefore, it is right for my hon. Friends to raise their concerns in the amendment about the use of the PFI in the health service.

That apart, if the only effect of the Bill was to reassure providers of private finance contributing to PFI projects there would be much less objection to it. In reality, however, it is a much wider Bill which appears to give a blank cheque to NHS trusts. It gives them unlimited security for borrowing, which they have never had before. NHS trusts have not been able to take out mortgages in the past, so they have done little borrowing. Under the Bill, the whole of the public sector would stand behind their borrowing but there is no mechanism in it to control the exercise of the immense new powers that it conveys upon them. That is the problem to which the amendment draws attention. As the amendment says, the Bill

"gives an open-ended commitment on the part of the taxpayer to honour the liabilities of NHS Trusts irrespective of the manner in which they have accrued".

I have not yet heard any Conservative Member address that point.

NHS trusts cannot be dissolved through insolvency, only by order of the Secretary of State, and the Bill sets out what will then happen. In the few minutes that I have, I want to suggest some of the circumstances in which a trust might run into financial problems of a kind which could lead to the powers in the Bill being invoked, other

than the circumstances for which we have been told that the Bill is intended—where a trust is dissolved for a non-financial reason and PFI liabilities are outstanding. But there are many other circumstances in which the powers in the Bill might be invoked. I shall illustrate that by describing the immense financial pressures being faced by health providers in my area of east London as the new financial year approaches. I want to concentrate on the possibility of trusts accruing liabilities in a manner other than through the PFI, as the reasoned amendment points out.

The work load borne by the health service in Newham is immense because the demand is immense. The Government's own figures show that Newham has the highest level of urban deprivation in the country with Tower Hamlets and Hackney, the other two areas covered by the East London and the City health authority, only just behind. I take no pleasure in saying it, but it is a fact that in east London there is an immense concentration of urban deprivation which is reflected in the area's health statistics. Whichever statistics one chooses, they all tell the same story: the health service in east London faces an immense task.

In 1988-92, the standardised mortality ratio in Newham was 109 compared with 100 in Britain. In 1992, it was 113. From 1988-92, the number of stillbirths and deaths in the first week of life per 1,000 total births was 9.8 in Newham compared with 8.2 in England and Wales. The percentage of total residents aged 16 and over who were prevented from working by permanent sickness was 3.9 per cent. in England and Wales but 4.9 per cent. in Newham. The percentage of limiting, long-standing illness among children aged up to four years was 2.7 per cent. in Newham compared with just 1.9 per cent. in England and Wales. Births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44—this statistic is good news, but it creates considerable work for the health service—were 87.3 in Newham compared with 63.6 in England and Wales.

Alongside that picture of the health service's considerable work load, the resources available to the service in east London are plainly inadequate. According to the Government's 1993 figures, about three quarters of general practitioner premises in Newham are in poor condition. Since then, nothing has substantially—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This debate is about NHS trusts. It is certainly not about GPs' premises. It is not in order to relate detailed statistics on Newham, important though they are. They need to be related to the Bill or to the reasoned amendment.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The possibility of a private finance initiative to raise the standard of GP premises has been considered by one of the trusts in the region, but I take your point. The community health service trust has considered that possibility, but I will endeavour to relate my remarks more closely to the Bill.

As the reasoned amendment sets out, trusts may accrue liabilities in other ways and not simply through the PFI. That is the anxiety to which I want to draw attention. I talked about GPs' premises. The number of dentists and health visitors employed by the community health service trust is small relative to the population.

That is the position today. What worries me is the stress and the despair that I see among some of the people working in those conditions for the health service trusts. This is where I come to the circumstances in which the Bill will apply. The East London and the City health authority faces a large deficit next year just to keep the existing service level going. Estimates of that deficit vary between £7 million and £20 million for the coming financial year. Whatever the figure is, it is certainly a large sum and no one to whom I have spoken in the trusts has the faintest idea how that gap can be bridged. The mood is dark in the trusts that will be on the receiving of the cuts required to bridge that deficit. I would not rule out the possibility of a trust not being able to meet its financial liabilities and running into the situation in which the Bill will apply.

The position is much worse even than that. This is where people start to become angry. The new capitation formula for district health authorities will remove another large sum—in excess of £11 million—from the East London and the City health authority budget. That will be done under the new formula based on work conducted by York university, but significantly changed from what it recommended. It has not yet been implemented, but I understand that it has been confirmed as a direction in which the Government intend to move.

York university was charged with providing a resource allocations formula that reflected need. It did so, but the Department of Health changed it for reasons that have still not been explained, so that the formula no longer reflects need. In the document entitled "The Resource Allocation Consequences of the New NHS Needs Formula", published in May 1995, York university states:

> "In implementing the work, the Department of Health had to make a judgment about which needs index to use for distributing funds not relating to inpatient use. In the event, they have chosen to allocate 64 per cent. of the total budget according to the acute index, 12 per cent. according to the psychiatric index, and 24 per cent. according to no needs index. The report notes that the use of no needs weighting for such a large block of services, which includes community and mental handicap services, can be challenged. It illustrates the importance of the issue by comparing the Department's preferred formula with an alternative, in which the 24 per cent. is allocated using the York acute index. It is found that this option would redirect amounts of up to 5 per cent. away from the home counties towards the inner cities."

I am extremely concerned about the fact that that element is not there. Its absence cause serious financial problems for the trusts in east London.

I have corresponded with the Minister about that subject, but, given the problems that are being created, I am still at a loss to understand why the Government are pursuing the use of that formula. I have repeatedly attempted to find out why a formula is being introduced that so dramatically shifts resources away from the trusts, where they are most needed, but I still have not obtained anything like a satisfactory explanation.

The resource allocation formula is wrong. It has the opposite effect to that advertised as the Government's intention. The only explanation for its adoption that I have found is one of partisan advantage, which is disgraceful. The formula needs to be changed radically in line with York university's original proposals, so that it has the effect that the Government claimed to want.

Given the way in which things are going now, it is entirely possible that a trust, or trusts, will find it extremely difficult to meet financial obligations in east London, Manchester, Sunderland and other areas that are particularly badly affected by the formula, and the powers

[Mr. Timms]

in the Bill will then need to be invoked. If there is no change in the direction in which health service funding is going, we shall very soon find ourselves in the position described in the Bill. That will be to the immense disadvantage not just of people in east London and the other areas most affected, but of the Government.

9.5 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I can hardly be accused of hostility to the idea of public-private partnership. Let me declare an interest that, for the other purposes of the debate, need not be mentioned: I am chairman of Yorkshire Fund Managers, a joint venture company owned by Yorkshire Enterprise in the public sector and York Trust in the private sector. I have chaired the company for the past six years. The money from the public sector that goes into investments through Yorkshire Fund Managers is far more than matched by money from the private sector. My point is that I am very used to dealing with public-private partnership. As a Leeds Member, let me add that the Leeds initiative has gained a good reputation through its work with the private sector. Partnerships of this kind often make it possible for many things to be done that could not be done in the public sector alone.

The Secretary of State said that people had asked about the fact that those holding his office could still decide at the last minute whether to meet health bodies' liabilities. Why has that question just come to the fore? Why was it not asked of the last Secretary of State, or of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)? I think that it has arisen now for two reasons. First, there has been a considerable increase in the number of potential PFIs in the health service. That has always been a possibility, but, as the Secretary of State made clear at Question Time today, he has been signing go-ahead agreements more and more frequently. As the right hon. Gentleman accepted, however, those agreements did not have the signature that would enable the contracts to be let and things to move ahead. Before that could happen, an assurance had to be given to the providers of the money. Haste was therefore necessary. Nevertheless, I do not think that those signatures can be forthcoming until there is a clear understanding of the safeguards that exist on either side.

Secondly, there is the concentration on health finances. Many health service trusts are in the sort of difficulty referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms): they do not know how their ends will be met, and they find that they do not receive a very sympathetic hearing from the Secretary of State.

It would be apposite to illustrate that point from what is happening to health in Leeds. One of the three agreements that have been given the go-ahead by the Secretary of State since the Budget involves St. James's hospital in Leeds. The St. James's and Seacroft University Hospitals NHS Trust is currently in deficit. The Government's attitude to that deficit is not especially sympathetic. My questions arise naturally from that. The Minister may say that there is much difference between capital and revenue but the same considerations arise when the Government's decisions on finance seem to increase, rather than decrease, deficits.

With all the other Leeds Members, I was invited to meet Leeds community health council to discuss that issue last Friday. The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) attended, with three Labour Members. According to the CHC, the St. James's trust faces a £6 million deficit this year. Not only that, but United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, which covers Leeds general infirmary, faces a £6 million deficit this year. The health authority has a £2 million deficit. Leeds is £14 million in deficit, according to the CHC.

Naturally, after such a meeting, one tries to check the figures. I found that the health authority was talking about a large deficit. It expected a deficit at Jimmy's of more than £1 million and a larger figure of £7 million at the Leeds general infirmary. The total figure was not so different from that of the CHC. It went further in talking about the deficits expected next year. Knowing the sums allocated by the Government for health in Leeds for the next year, it expected a deficit of nearly £5 million for St. James's and about £10 million for the LGI. Those are serious deficits.

Everything comes back to the way in which the Government have allocated health resources. Their use of the formula, as was demonstrated by the York economists, has acted against cities. That decision has resulted in a massive transfer of funds from cities where there is real and pressing need to areas where the need is not so demonstrably large, though I believe that health service funds are needed everywhere.

The hospital trusts and the health service in Leeds are penalised by the way in which the Government have allocated funds. In response to that, the Conservative party and Ministers have not recognised that, for Leeds as a whole, an estimated £18 million shortfall has been caused by that decision. Instead, they say that Leeds is overspending by £3.1 million. There is a difference of some £21 million between the Government's thinking and that of people who work in the health service in Leeds about the funding that the city needs. Under those circumstances, it is not surprising that people would wish us to hesitate before underwriting the money that is to be allocated for such projects.

I am told that it is hoped that the St. James's project contract will be signed in April. In those circumstances, it would be the first scheme to go ahead. I recognise that some of the facilities will benefit some of my constituents, so I hope that the scheme goes ahead. I accept that it will benefit the public of Leeds as a whole, so I wish it well. One improvement that will help my constituents is that 166 of the 246 extra beds will be available in the public sector.

Let us consider some of the conditions that my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) says should apply to public-private partnerships. First, the health service must be run by the NHS; secondly, private finance must be in partnership with public finance; thirdly, the public sector must set the priorities in the public interest.

The St. James's scheme meets some of those conditions, but a number of important questions remain. What happened to the original scheme for the development at St. James's? I was a member of the Leeds health authority before coming to the House; I was also a member of the local council. The health authority asked me to approach the local authority because the city

council owned a great deal of land around the St. James's site. I played a minor part in the negotiations that eventually led to the transfer of 13.5 acres of land to the hospital trust.

The PFI uses that very land. The press release that accompanied the announcement about the transfer made it clear that the local authority played a key role throughout. It was right that the local authority should make that land available. However, I remember that when I was first asked to approach the city council the primary uses for the land were intended to be for a car park and a nurses' home. The car park project still exists, but can the Minister tell me what happened to the nurses' home?

I want the Minister to give me an assurance about the development. When the general public go to St. James's, the worst aspect for them is that it is almost impossible to park. It is sometimes an advantage to be a Member of Parliament as it enables me to park at St. James's hospital. That gives me an advantage when I want to nip in and see my constituents. The public complain bitterly about the car parking problem.

I want to be sure that if the private sector is involved in providing the car park, the parking charges will not be such that my constituents will not be able to afford to park when they visit their relatives. I am, of course, referring to those of my constituents who can manage to get to the hospital by private transport; large numbers of them cannot do so. We do not expect the parking to be free, but the charge should not be greater than they would pay in a small city council car park outside the hospital.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am having enormous difficulty relating car parking charges to the Bill, but perhaps it will all become clear in a moment.

Mr. Gunnell: It is clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the scheme will, rightly, go ahead—yet there are still questions to ask about the financing of it.

I shall rapidly move away from that subject and raise one or two other issues. I would like to be sure that safeguards are in place. I believe that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) got it wrong. He said that this is a Bill in which the risk is borne by the private sector, not by the public sector. It is obvious from what the Secretary of State for Health said that the public sector carries the risk. What will happen if something goes wrong with the private sector partners who are involved in this project? If the private sector partners go bust, will the Secretary of State bail them out as well?

If there is a hospital and part of it is private and part of it is public, what conditions will apply to the staff? Morale is already at a low ebb among staff in the health service, and I would not like to think that there would be two sets of staff with different sets of conditions of service—so that some are seen to have a more privileged position.

I am disappointed that some facilities will not be available to most of my constituents. If the private sector is involved in the scheme, it will want to get something out of it. We have to be careful to keep that well under control, to ensure that any scheme that goes ahead has a strong net benefit to the public sector and to ensure that it is genuinely carried out at a lower cost than the public sector would be paying if it were getting that same benefit by going it alone.

9.21 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Today's debate has exposed the shambles that the Government have made of their attempts to privatise parts of the national health service. Successive Secretaries of State have promised us newer, bigger and better hospitals; they have promised us faster and more efficient services; and they have assured us that the Conservatives have a gleaming vision for an invigorated, market-managed, private sector-controlled national health service. However, the words of the Tories—and of the Secretary of State today—have been shown for what they are: hollow, empty promises. An endless stream of broken promises has brought the Secretary of State to the House today with this Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) detailed those broken promises: Norwich, Carlisle, Swindon, Durham and others have been waiting years for new hospital buildings. They have been promised by the Government but have been continually delayed. The Secretary of State for Health spoke at the Royal College of Physicians on Tuesday 21 November 1995, and I shall quote from part of his speech:

"Every part of the country has its own story of a new facility that has been promised and planned and then delayed, mangled and often cancelled. Too many NHS hospitals bear the scars of this haphazard process".

Perhaps the Secretary of State would like to reflect on his words at that conference—they describe exactly the shambles that he has created with the private finance initiative in the health service. When he used those words, he claimed that he was painting a picture of public sector capital planning, but he must see that they apply fully to the situation that he has brought before the House today.

The Secretary of State for Health and the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) quoted what I said at a conference of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry earlier this year. I shall give hon. Members the benefit of the doubt because it is quite clear that the Central Office brief used only a small part of my speech in relation to what I said about PFI. I should like to put what I said at the conference in context. I said:

"We do not disagree with PFI—how could we? It was Labour who first thought of partnerships between the public and private sector. We argued that it would enhance investment because of the long-term inability of governments to maintain capital investment".

I then said—this is the section that was missed out in the Smith square brief:

"But what the Conservatives are attempting is to replace capital investment with PFI. The Budget produced a 17 per cent. cut in the NHS capital programme. The Secretary of State believes that private finance will fill this gap. But, to do so, there needs to be—in one year—a massive 242 per cent. increase in private money poured into the NHS. Given the history of PFI in the Health Service, can we really expect that to happen?"

The answer to that question is no, we cannot expect that to happen. That is what is behind it. The Government have forgotten that the private sector is not as unconnected from reality as they are. The private sector has realised what the Department has failed to acknowledge since the very first day that it set the internal market in train: that the so-called NHS reforms, and specifically the internal market, are incoherent, ill thought out, ineffectively planned and incompetently implemented.

Today, the Secretary of State has placed before the House a Bill to revise those reforms, rewrite the past and reinterpret his role. That has been the most striking feature

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

of the Secretary of State's tenure at the Department. He has attempted to retell the story of the Conservative Government's fragmentation of our national health service, with himself as its saviour, although he fails to mention that he is trying to save the NHS from the Tory Government of whom he is a member.

The Bill is not about trying to make this discredited Government look good on health by claiming to care; it is about patching up another hole in the NHS framework that the Government have created. Because there is no guarantee within the national health service framework that it will be paid, the private sector will not bail out the Government in their failed PFI policy so, in a classic piece of double-think, the Government are bailing themselves out by guaranteeing the payments that it needs to survive. It is like someone jumping out of a crashing aeroplane to keep the plane aloft and save themselves from death.

At least the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) had the courage to say what the Bill was about; the Secretary of State avoided doing so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham rightly said that the Bill had not been thought out. The fundamental purpose is not, as the Secretary of State claimed, a minor revision of already followed practices. It is not a Bill to clear up an anomaly in law. Patching up another hole in the NHS framework means undermining many principles that the Government claim to be sacred. The Bill would fundamentally alter the basis on which the Department and the public purse take on liabilities. It would expose the public sector to as much as £5 billion of liabilities, which the Secretary of State would have no way of controlling.

The House has been asked to pass a Bill giving the private sector the right to charge the national health service as much as £5 billion for its services, safe in the knowledge that it could bankrupt NHS trusts and still get its money back.

Mr. Horam *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Barron: I am willing to give way on that point, because the Secretary of State said earlier that trusts can borrow without his consent. It is my contention that that is at the back of this.

The Secretary of State is asking the House to underwrite £5 billion of private sector contracts without any Minister having a say in what the contracts are for or what they contain. The Bill spends public money without public accountability. No Minister would have a right to control the mounting liabilities that the Bill might create. Ministers get no say in writing the contracts; they write the cheques only if those contracts go wrong.

That is not what the private finance initiative in the national health service was designed for. That is not what Ministers told the House and the country that the PFI would do. When the national health service executive wrote last year to pass on the ministerial diktats on PFI, it did not say to the trusts, "Spend as much money as you like; enter any crazy contract you wish; the Government do not need to know. We shall just bail you out if you make that decision." Instead, on 20 March 1995, the NHS executive said:

"A fundamental principle of the PFI is transfer of risk to the private sector."

This Bill does exactly the opposite. It makes contracting in the NHS under the PFI totally gilt-edged and absolutely risk free.

The NHS guideline notes on the PFI were specific. They detailed, in a headline style, 20 ways in which to transfer risks. The notes said:

"In many cases, the private sector should be able cost-effectively to assume the entire responsibility for the first ten risks, while taking a substantial share of the rest."

Some of the risks identified were:

"construction cost overruns; losses caused by late completion; costs of correcting defects; maintenance and repair costs; failed income generation schemes; failure to meet targets; losses through inefficiency and competition; higher than expected running costs; losses from unexpectedly low resale values."

The list goes on. If this Bill is passed, that list of possible risks will be transferred not to the private sector but to the Secretary of State.

How does the Minister who will make the winding up speech hope to reconcile the Bill's purpose with the Secretary of State's comments to the Royal College of Physicians in November last year, when he said:

"We seek a risk-bearing partnership with the private sector which allows a proper return to the successful partner, but expects the unsuccessful partner to carry his proper share of responsibility."

Where is the responsibility if we say that the British taxpayer, without taking a part in the decision, can write off any liabilities that are entered into? There is none.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said that there is no risk, and he is absolutely right. In Carlisle, a hospital that was promised years ago has been slowed down by the PFI, and any risk that was to be taken by the private sector will now be written off. I must commend his speech. I also looked at the soccer results before I came back into the Chamber, and Rotherham United have beaten Carlisle 2-0 tonight. We will be going to Wembley on 14 April. Their team made it last year, so we are sharing in the success.

This Bill ends risk-bearing by private contractors. Their bills are guaranteed to be paid, no matter how badly they have designed, built, financed or operated the contracted duties. Trusts could be falling over people offering to contract with them. Conceivably, a contract could be presented to build a new facility for free, a few cost overruns could be dropped in and then the contract could be laid on the Secretary of State, who would pick up the tab.

Mr. Dorrell: That is not true.

Mr. Barron: That is true; the right hon. Gentleman did not explain any of that when he opened the debate. This Bill is nothing more than a charter for cowboys, who could use it to milk the British taxpayer through the NHS.

The Bill is a cynical measure. It has been designed so that, in the run-up to the general election, the Secretary of State and, perhaps, the Prime Minister can be seen walking around building sites, promising new hospitals for all. In this debate we have heard about the six years that people in Norwich have had to wait, and they still do not know if there is an agreement. Ministers know full well, as does the House, that they will be exposing us—

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman has just dropped down out of the Gallery.

Ministers will be exposing us to a possible £5 billion worth of debt, over which the Secretary of State will have no control at all.

Mr. Thompson: I am conscious of the fact that I have not been present through all the debate, but references to Norwich should be accurate. The long delays in the Norwich hospital have been due to changes of mind on the siting of the hospital and have nothing to do with the PFI. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will persuade members of the Labour party to stop campaigning for alternative sites, because that will cause further delay. He should concentrate on matters that he knows something about.

Mr. Barron: I am pleased that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, because he is using the same logic as that used by the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), who argued that the Worcester hospital has been delayed for the past two years because of our amendment.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) should have been here earlier to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham read out a press release that was produced by the Department of Health in 1990. The then Secretary of State read out the press release and spoke of the great things that were to happen involving the new hospital in Norwich. It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman was not here to hear that.

Many people are concerned that the PFI is nothing more than a ramp for privatisation, and those concerns are heightened by the overarching secrecy that surrounds the PFI. The Secretary of State smiles, but many clinicians inside the NHS fear that the decisions that they take now will not be taken if other people, who put the concrete in the hospitals, also run and manage the services. The Secretary of State knows that that is the case because it is well documented. That is why the right hon. Gentleman says that the Government will never do anything unless clinicians say that it is all right to do so. He knows that he ignored those same clinicians when they wrote to him to say that he should not reorganise the National Blood Authority.

The Bill commits the House to supporting debt resulting from contractual obligations about which we can discover nothing. Secrecy and mystery surround every turn of the PFI process. When I recently received some information from one hospital trust about the PFI, the paper came in marked "confidential" and its recipients were sworn to secrecy about its contents. The document contained nothing more exciting than a budget for running the PFI process. That budget is commonly acknowledged to be in the region of £1 million a time.

The greatest secrecy surrounding PFI is that nobody knows where the boundaries are. At last month's health questions I asked the Secretary of State to tell the House which services were clinical services—and therefore need not go out to PFI—and which were clinical support services. He said that the clinical and clinical support services were

"both well-known terms of art within the health service. The scope of those terms is well defined."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 794.]

He should remember that occasion as I wrote to him two days later and asked him to define the terms. I thought that the House would appreciate a list stating which services were clinical and which were not. In view of what he had said, I thought that my request was reasonable, but one month has passed and my postbag remains singularly empty of correspondence on that matter from the Secretary of State. Perhaps he will answer the letter and tell me exactly what he means when he talks about PFI in the health service.

Is it true that nothing is outside the scope of the PFI and literally everything is up for grabs? If so, I believe that the House will take a dim view of the privatisation of clinical services with a cast-iron guarantee of return from the Government. Clinicians are already worried that their service will be privatised and the Bill will not ease their concerns.

Contractors are worried that they will not get paid if the Secretary of State does not change more NHS regulations. The Bill is designed to make them feel better. Contractors and private sector consortiums fear that they are being asked to sign agreements with weak and insubstantial NHS trusts.

The Government's health service reforms have created organisations that the Secretary of State can dissolve almost at will; they lack accountability to their communities and to Parliament. The reforms have created trusts that operate without effective forms of control; they are able to borrow without the statutory approval of the Secretary of State. The private sector fears that the agreements entered into with the trusts will not be safe. Banks fear losses and the insecurity caused by the continual upheaval in the NHS brought about by the internal market.

There are also Government fears: Ministers fear that their reforms have created a monster that they cannot control. They fear that they have built a system that stands permanently on the point of collapse, which is exactly what they have done. The Government fear the electoral annihilation that awaits them and Ministers fear voters far more than any concerns about the massive increase in public borrowing that the Bill could bring about.

The Labour party cares about the public purse and public borrowing, which is why we shall vote for our reasoned amendment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham said earlier, we cannot support the Second Reading of the Bill because it commits the taxpayer to signing a blank cheque for as much as £5 billion over which the Secretary of State has no control. It is a badly thought-out Bill that is being rushed through the House by a scared Government who are unable to cope with the chaos that they have created in the national health service.

It is inconceivable that the so-called anomaly has only now come to the Department's attention. Newchurch and Co.—the official guardians of the PFI in the health service—recognised in autumn 1994 the problems created by the Government's haphazard and incoherent trust system. It questioned the implications of the dissolution of a trust and said:

"The rights of contractors in the event of default by an NHS trust is an issue of concern to many."

It is quite clear that the Government have resisted changing the law at least since 1994. One might think that the issue was not keeping the Secretary of State awake at night until two weeks ago when he telephoned my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham. The Government have known about the anomaly for a long time and their best

[Mr. Barron]

effort ignores their own logic. Newchurch consultants have long recognised—as they say in their "Guide to the PFI"—that

> "In all but the most exceptional circumstances, capital sourced from the private sector is going to be more expensive than money provided by Her Majesty's Treasury".

The Secretary of State has admitted that it is perfectly true that capital always costs more in the private sector than it does in the public sector. In his speech to the Royal College of Physicians, he said:

> "I am strongly in favour of testing public and private sector solutions and adopting the approach which offers best value".

We agree entirely with best value, but we remain unconvinced that worst value can be underwritten by the Bill and that the Department of Health does not have to take a decision about it.

We tabled the amendment because we are concerned about the state of the national health service. We do not believe that the PFI is any substitute for the public investment that was cut by 17 per cent. in the last Budget. If the PFI is to apply to the health service, it should be on the basis that it is additional and that it will do what it is supposed to do. Dozens of hospitals that should have been built—some of them years ago—remain on the architects' drawings boards because of the Government's belief that the private sector is always the way to go. We do not believe that that is correct in all circumstances. *[Interruption.]*

The Secretary of State sits there heckling with his feet up. He should start doing his job: he should come to the Dispatch Box and, instead of being flip, tell us the real consequences of the legalisation that he introduces in this place. I ask my hon. Friends to join me in the Division Lobby tonight in order to begin to sort out the mess that the Government have made.

9.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I am somewhat disappointed by the efforts of Opposition Front-Bench Members in the debate. I am aware that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), following the rumpus surrounding her decision to send her son to an excellent school in my constituency—I have not had the opportunity to congratulate her on her excellent choice; Bromley is renowned for its hospitals as well as its education facilities—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The Bill is about the Health Service and not schools.

Mr. Horam: I congratulate the hon. Lady, and I know that she will accept it in good heart. Following the rumpus surrounding her decision, she no doubt wanted to show her mettle and prove that she is not a liability to the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. McLeish: It was an excellent speech.

Mr. Horam: The hon. Gentleman may have thought so, but I am not sure that that is the consensus in the House. The hon. Lady was rather unwise to take such a strident line with regard to the Bill. It is clearly a responsible measure—any objective observer would regard it as the ultimate in responsibility. It is a Bill of probity. The Bill will save the taxpayer far more money than the largesse to which the hon. Lady referred. I know that the Opposition are rather more casual in their regard to money than we are, but the Bill will save the taxpayer a great deal of money.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Minister giving way. I understand the point that he is making, which relates to the national health service. Just a few weeks ago, we were informed by the Minister responsible for health in Northern Ireland that, because of its confidential nature, he could not give us advance notice of a similar measure relating to Northern Ireland. He went on to say that it would be dealt with by negative resolution. Yet there is doubt as to whether it could meet the Privy Council calendar and take effect at the same time as the Bill.

Would it be possible, even at this late stage, for the legislation to cover the national health service in Scotland and Northern Ireland, bearing it in mind that there is a wry expression on the faces of people in Dungannon, where a private finance initiative that was prepared to invest in a magnetic resonance imaging scanner was turned down?

Mr. Horam: The commencement of the Bill is a separate matter, but I have heard what the hon. Gentleman said, and no doubt my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will ensure that the matter is dealt with sensibly and properly at the appropriate time.

I wonder whether the hon. Member for Peckham really understands the line that she has taken. Once again, she said that the PFI is about privatisation and that she is opposed to it, unlike many of her hon. Friends, including the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), until his rather dutiful retraction during his closing remarks. I was rather sorry that he had to explain away his words.

The Opposition are not clear where they stand. We are uniformly and unilaterally united in favour of PFI, while they cannot make up their mind. They use weasel words about private and public partnerships. At least the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell), in an excellent speech, made it perfectly clear that he understands what the Bill is about, and I hope that he will join us in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: No. The Opposition are unclear as to whether they are opposed to the PFI, half-heartedly in favour of it or wholly in favour of it.

Unusually, the Opposition's health spokesmen wish to put the Department of Health in a worse position than other Departments. As was pointed out in the *Financial Times* this morning, the Bill seeks to create a level playing field. The Health Department is currently in a worse position than other Departments in regard to raising private money, precisely because of existing legislation.

Ms Harman: Whose legislation?

Mr. Horam: The legislation goes back to 1977 and 1948, so we cannot make it a party political matter.

The Bill creates a level playing field. The hon. Lady, as Opposition health spokesman, is prepared to place the Health Department in a worse position. She has not understood that—perhaps she did not read the *Financial Times* this morning—but she is prepared to accept it. I understand that she does not want to build more hospitals through the use of private finance in the same way as we do, but it is extraordinary that she wishes to disadvantage health in relation to other areas of spending such as education. The hon. Lady has got herself into an extraordinary position in opposing the Bill.

Finally, the hon. Lady said that a threat hangs over the hospitals as a result of the PFI, yet she plans to vote against the Bill. If there is a threat hanging over hospitals, the Bill provides exactly the way to remove it. Again, the Opposition are in a total muddle.

Mr. Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: No. I have very little time.

The Opposition take a contradictory position. Members of Labour's Front-Bench team hold about three different positions, as between their leader and senior and junior health spokespersons. The Opposition accuse us of being in a shambles, but their position is a total mess.

Mr. Bradley: Will the Minister give way now?

Mr. Horam: No, because the hon. Gentleman did not take part in the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister has made it clear that he will not give way.

Mr. Horam: I am sorry if I cannot deal with all the points made in the debate, but there were several speeches, and a number of them were in similar vein. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) made an excellent speech.

Mr. Galbraith: No, it was not.

Mr. Horam: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not hear my hon. Friend, but I thought that his speech was excellent. He pointed out again that the Opposition have not committed themselves to an increase in resources. This Government committed themselves to increasing resources in real terms and fulfilled that commitment. The Opposition have yet to make any kind of commitment. The hon. Member for Peckham cannot wriggle out of her remarks about resources. It is particularly ironic, after all the fuss that Labour made after the previous general election, that the Opposition will not budge on resources. That is most telling.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury thought that there was a difference between finance leasing and an operating lease, which he wanted me to explore, and I shall do so. He conceded that much would depend on whether accountants could be made to agree. That is a rather different matter. I do not know about making lawyers or economists agree, but making accountants agree would certainly be extremely difficult.

The speech of the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) had all the hallmarks of Victorian melodrama. I am fond of the hon. Gentleman—he certainly adds colour and life to the House.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): Or to the Hackney Empire.

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend took the words out of my mouth. The hon. Gentleman's speech would have been good for the Hackney Empire. It was a Grand Guignol speech.

The hon. Gentleman was rightly concerned about fiscal probity. As a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, so am I, and certainly I do not run second to the hon. Gentleman in that matter. He can be assured that the Bill enhances the fiscal probity of the PFI and the NHS.

Ms Harman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: No, because I have not had a chance to get into my speech. I have 10 minutes left. No, nine minutes. Good heavens—that is ridiculous.

Ms Harman *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has made it clear that he will not give way.

Mr. Horam: There is also a convention that a Minister who is winding up after a seven-hour debate comprising as many speeches as we have heard today is allowed some time to reply to points made from all parts of the House. It is absurd of the hon. Lady, having made a 40-minute speech, to expect to intervene again.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who could not remain for the end of the debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), made points about hospitals in their constituencies. They understand my position and know that we are making good progress.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) made a telling and thoughtful intervention. He suggested as an alternative to the Bill an insurance premium, providing for payment in the case of default. I believe that the hon. Gentleman understands that money taken as insurance premiums from solvent trusts would reduce the money available for health care. He said that he supported the principle of the Bill, in the sense that the Government should be responsible for the way in which they conduct their business. Curiously, he went on to say that he could not support this particular Bill because he did not feel that we would test value for money in a suitable way. He is wrong. The whole point of the PFI is that it tests value for money against the public alternatives.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: No, I am not giving way because I have only six minutes left.

Public will be tested against private, and if private finance does not win, public finance will be used. That is the exact test that the hon. Member for Southwark and

[Mr. Horam]

Bermondsey wanted. He made an important point about how far the Bill would fill in the hole created by the withdrawal of capital funding from the public sector. He is right to point out, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agreed, that there is some withdrawal, for the year starting in April, from the capital fund for hospital provision. But there will be a huge increase of £1.3 billion in current spending, and even the hon. Gentleman must admit that all that money comes from the public sector.

We have been able to increase spending by so much—for nurses, doctors and health care—simply because we have made a much smaller reduction in capital funding. That small reduction has been partly covered by receipts from land sales, as well as by PFI investment, and there will be a huge overall increase in spending next year and a tiny decrease in public funding for the capital sector. The hon. Gentleman's point is, therefore, not really relevant.

I return to the speeches of Opposition Front Benchers. *[Interruption.]* Good heavens, I have only five minutes left. The hon. Member for Peckham claimed to make five points in her speech. I counted only four, so five was an exaggeration. She said that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had broken all the promises on hospitals. I know of no major delays in projects currently being implemented since the PFI arrangements were put in hand.

Mr. Martlew: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: No. Carlisle hospital is a good example of a hospital that has been built in stages. Stage 1 was completed in 1975, and nothing has been done since then. That is the reality of hospital building before the PFI—delay after delay, and stage 1, stage 2 and stage 3. Under the PFI, there will be no delay and we can build a hospital in one go. Nor should there be any delay, because the PFI exercise can be done in the same time and in the same way as going through a full business case. There would be no reason for any delay, and there has been no serious delay as a result of the PFI.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) made it clear in his intervention that Norwich hospital had suffered no delay as a result of the PFI. The hon. Member for Rother Valley mentioned North Durham hospital. The PFI has caused no delay for North Durham hospital.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: No, I have only three minutes left.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I repeat that the Minister has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Horam: The hon. Member for Peckham also made the tired claim that the PFI was a Trojan horse for privatisation. She had to go as far as Stonehaven in Scotland to produce one example that looks remotely like privatisation. Even that example is not privatisation of the clinical sector, but a perfectly sensible arrangement that the clinicians support.

The hon. Lady went on to try to link privatisation with market testing. Again, the Opposition are entirely wrong. Market testing has saved the taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds. A billion pounds in total has been saved by the health service by contracting out services, and that is a good example of the private sector bringing its skills to bear to improve the performance of health care.

The hon. Lady's final point—her coup de grâce—amounted to a ludicrous claim that this all means a blank cheque for £5 billion—as if there were no external financing limit, no quarterly reporting, no balance between receipt and revenue. The fact is that the Opposition's reasoned amendment is a nonsensical sham. It is wholly without substance, and it should be defeated.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 264, Noes 295.

Division No. 75] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter

Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes. Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Janet Anderson and
Mr. Malcolm Chisholm.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*

Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Burns and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (RESIDUAL LIABILITIES) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the National Health Service (Residual Liabilities) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

That the draft Deregulation (Special Hours Certificates) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 19th February, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Friendly Societies Act 1992) Order, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Electricity Pricing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): At this time of night, matters of interest and concern in relation to the privatised utilities are familiar territory to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the House. The regulators of those utilities often feature largely in such discussions. They include Offer, the Office of Electricity Regulation, Ofgas, the Office of Gas Supply and Ofwat, the Office of Water Services. We have not yet had Offrail or Offmilk, which were threatened at one stage. If the weekend recommendation that the monarchy might be privatised were accepted, we might find ourselves discussing Offcrown or, indeed, Offhead.

Despite the time of night, it is important to recognise that there is an issue of national significance here, although I shall also consider it in relation to the part of the south-west that I represent. There is consumer representation, which is extremely important, but the committees that represent the consumer increasingly find that their concerns are not being fully reflected in the way in which the industry is regulated. That applies to all the privatised utilities.

To a large extent, that is due to the buck-passing between the Minister and regulator in each of the respective sectors. The powers that each has and their inter-relationship is as important as the regulators' statutory responsibility. My colleagues in the south-west and I had a meeting today with professor Stephen Littlechild, regulator of the electricity industry. That clarified the borders of his responsibilities vis à vis the Minister.

Clearly, unbridled competition between regional electricity companies, the so-called RECs, is pre-supposed because that is what privatisation is all about. Equally, that competition pre-supposes elimination of the cross subsidies that were a feature of those utilities.

The National Grid, however, is a different matter: it is a national monopoly. It would indeed be a political decision to insist on full distance-related charges, especially if such charges now arise disproportionately. At the time of privatisation, assurances were given that the grid would remain a national service. Compare this privatisation with, for instance, the privatisation of British Telecom. What if, in those circumstances, that entire national service had been subjected to a straight distance-related charge? There would have been uproar by now, especially in the more peripheral parts of the United Kingdom.

The chairman of the South West electricity consumers committee has drawn the attention of hon. Members representing my region to a new development. He writes:

"The Office of Electricity Regulation has recently unveiled proposals to increase the electricity transmission charges imposed by the National Grid Company on electricity supplied to the South West. As you will know, customers in the South West are already penalised by a charging structure which takes account of the distance that power has to be transmitted from the generating stations, predominantly in the North of England, to the consumer. It is now proposed that the costs of losses on the transmission system be recouped in the same manner.

The existing charging structure already means that electricity customers in the South West pay more than almost anywhere else in the country. These latest proposals could mean further increases of up to 2 per cent., with Devon and Cornwall being particularly badly affected."

I emphasise that, although the chairman referred to the south-west, the principle will apply throughout the country, and the more peripheral areas furthest away from the centres of generating capacity will suffer similarly.

An excellent overview by the Centre for the Study of Regulated Industries shows that the typical South Western Electricity domestic bill for 1994-95, after rebates, was £303.66—the highest in England. I know that Conservative Members representing my region will share my fear that, having already reached the highest point, we are likely to be pushed even further away from the norm.

There are, of course, many factors at work, and the future is very unclear. The CRI brief shows that a number of influences may affect future prices: National Grid rebates, distribution price controls and the sale of the nuclear elements of the generating industry—and, indeed, the extent to which that may or may not be postponed, and its effect on the nuclear levy. There are also the reductions in overall generating prices as a result of new contracts; and who knows what competition will do?

I do not want to overestimate the extent to which the latest development to which our attention has been drawn will alter the overall level of electricity costs in the south-west, or, indeed, other areas that are similarly affected. One thing is certain, however: the cumulative disadvantage is likely to increase rather than decrease. That was recognised today—by complete coincidence, as far as I am aware. In Northern Ireland, it has now been acknowledged that the discrepancy requires the award of a £60 million grant. Some of us in other parts of the United Kingdom may feel that our case is almost as strong. All areas of this kind—the south-west, Wales and Northern Ireland being the most obvious—tend to contain more small industrial firms, so they cannot even benefit from the high-volume tariffs that are comparatively common elsewhere.

Along with my south-west Liberal Democrat colleagues who are here this evening, and who attended our meeting with the regulator this afternoon, I have some special concerns. If the differential is allowed to increase, even discriminating within the South Western Electricity area—more specifically, for each National Grid zone within that area—regions such as Cornwall and Devon will be hit particularly hard. That will add to the existing calamitous water and other household costs in an area where, after the initial experiment with gas competition, we are bound to face higher prices than other parts of the country.

I need hardly remind the House that the south-west has high unemployment and low household incomes. Cornwall is especially badly affected by both. The cumulative effect of that series of differentials is disastrous.

There are wider implications for similar parts of the country. Professor Littlechild agrees with that but has also said:

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

"there are important advantages in more cost-reflective transmission charges. Better pricing signals will encourage investment in new generation plant in areas where it is needed, like the south-west. This would also increase energy efficiency, reduce the need for new transmission lines and benefit the local economy."

The House will immediately realise that those signals will be effective only if they are aimed at the appropriate decision makers. That is a sine qua non. Secondly, they must be sufficiently powerful to offset other economic factors pulling in the opposite direction. No one will decide on the basis of the so-called signals to invest in new generating capacity in an area such as Cornwall without other factors being brought into play. There is evidence that the signals will, in the present circumstances, fail on both counts.

If the signals are imposed on the consumer, they will have no impact on the decision makers. The generators take investment decisions, not the consumers. In the past, consumers have had little or no impact on generating capacity. It should be remembered that in the far south-west, the Central Electricity Generating Board closed down power stations at Hayle, Plymouth and Yelland against local opposition. Many of us felt that employment, economic potential and spreading energy capacity around the country were important objectives that those decisions went against.

The decision makers ignored the effect on local people then, so why should they listen to local consumers now? It is ironic that the CEGB took those decisions on the specific ground that transmission charges from elsewhere in the United Kingdom were likely to be so low that the closures would be cheaper than continuing local generation, which they argued would be too expensive. Some hon. Members here tonight will recall those decisions being made against local opposition.

Offer and the RECs cannot have it both ways. If they argue, as they appear to, that the costs will be only marginal, clearly they will have only a marginal impact.

Our discussions with the regulator this afternoon appeared to move towards a possible solution. That is why at the outset of my speech, I emphasised the difference between the responsibilities of the regulator and those of Ministers. It appears that the only way to achieve the possible remedy is by ministerial direction. If we could find a mechanism to ensure that the decision makers—the generators—have to bear the extra cost of inefficient transmission over long distances in a way that safeguards the position of consumers in vulnerable areas such as the south-west, there is clearly some prospect for success. That would apply perhaps to Wales, and for all I know, to Northern Ireland.

Professor Littlechild acknowledged the force of that argument in respect of both tests—its effect on decision makers and its economic impact—and that that course would be preferable. It was clear from our discussions with him this afternoon that if extra burdens on south-west consumers were imposed, they would be damaging. However, it was equally clear that those burdens are by no means automatic. They do not have to follow from the decision to try to cut out all cross-subsidies but it will need Government intervention to prevent them doing so.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): Perhaps I can help to persuade the Minister of the case. He represents the Department of Trade and Industry, which spends considerable sums trying to support business in the south-west. There is little point in that money being spent if it is cancelled out by the extra costs on business from electricity charges. Therefore, our suggestion could be a net saving to the Department as it would not have to spend money overcoming problems that it is itself creating.

Mr. Tyler: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I am sure that the Minister will acknowledge that the disincentive to incoming investment and, perhaps, to the natural growth of companies already resident in the region is extremely important to avoid if we are to achieve a more economically successful region and, indeed, save the hon. Gentleman and his Department money in the long run. It is precisely this sort of signal, as the regulator calls it, that can discourage people from bringing their investment in new businesses and jobs to a region such as ours, which so desperately needs them.

That is why we lay such emphasis on what is otherwise seen as a comparatively marginal difference between our region and other regions. For example, if a business is contemplating moving either to Scotland, where electricity costs are comparatively low, or to the south-west, which may be comparable in other ways, it is yet another disincentive to come west and an incentive to go north. As Conservative Members as well as my Liberal Democrat colleagues have been able to establish in recent weeks, there have been huge incentives to take people north of the border. This could be yet another factor.

Left to themselves, in the present regime the National Grid Company, the regional electricity companies and Professor Littlechild seem almost bound to end all cross-subsidy. In those circumstances, the consumers in those areas furthest from the power stations will pay full distance-related charges. It need not be so. If Ministers so choose, they could instruct that the differentials were borne by the generators, not the end consumer—be it business, commercial, industrial or domestic. Not only would that obviously benefit all those consumers—and, as I have just said, in the wider economic sense be a huge benefit to the south-west and similar areas—it would also encourage a revival of generating capacity in those areas.

I fear that without that ministerial intervention the far south-west will be destined to suffer the worst penalties of privatisation in every direction. I therefore plead with the Minister at least to take seriously the suggestion made today, as a result of our discussions with the regulator, and to look at a different mechanism that could avoid this disaster.

10.32 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on raising this subject for tonight's debate and on giving me this opportunity to say a few words in response. I hope that he will understand if I do not follow him down the side track of saying what an excellent record the Government have on producing inward investment in the south-west.

I want to say a few words about the background to electricity privatisation and the way in which electricity prices are determined under the regulatory regime that the Government put in place at the time of privatisation. I shall then come to the issue that the hon. Gentleman raised of regional variations in electricity prices.

A key point about the Government's policy for the restructuring and privatisation of the electricity industry was that

"Decisions about the supply of electricity should be driven by the needs of customers."

The privatisation framework was also guided by a number of further principles: for example, that competition is the best guarantee of the customer's interests; that regulation should be designed to promote competition, oversee prices and protect the customer's interests in areas where natural monopoly will remain; that security and safety of supply must be maintained; and that customers should be given new rights, not safeguards.

The Government's reorganisation of the electricity industry before privatisation provided the framework for giving effect to those principles. The old Central Electricity Generating Board was divided into three competing generators—National Power, PowerGen and Nuclear Electric. The National Grid was transferred to the ownership of the 12 regional electricity companies, and it was responsible for electricity transmission and the independent central dispatch of electricity generating plant. Regional electricity companies are facing increasing competition in their authorised areas as their franchise markets are progressively reduced.

An important part of the electricity privatisation framework has been the creation of an independent regulator. The hon. Gentleman referred to the Director General of Electricity Supply and to the conversations and the meetings that he has had with him. That man is the head of the Office of Electricity Regulation and his job is to promote competition and to constrain the activities of the remaining monopolies and dominant suppliers.

This framework has brought significant benefits to the electricity consumer. For example, since privatisation prices have fallen, domestic prices have fallen by 7 per cent. in real terms—excluding VAT—and industrial prices have fallen by 10 per cent. in real terms. There have been some genuine new rights for customers, in the form of the ability of customers outside the RECs' franchise markets—which are being progressively reduced, and which will be ended completely by 1998—to shop around and select a supplier of their choice. There are guaranteed standards of performance of supply for tariff customers, set by the DGES, covering aspects such as the need to keep appointments on the date specified and fixed amounts of compensation for customers in the event that the guaranteed standards are not met.

There are overall performance standards that the RECs are to meet, such as the minimum percentage of supplies to be reconnected following faults within three hours and within 24 hours. There are new codes of practice to cover matters such as how to handle customer complaints, the efficient use of electricity, services for the elderly and disabled, and arrangements for paying bills. Customers have the opportunity to complain to an independent regulator, the DGES, and for those complaints to be investigated by the Office of Electricity Regulation.

In 1990, the RECs' transitional franchise market—the market within which the RECs were the monopoly suppliers—comprised sites taking 1 MW or less, and in April 1994 it was reduced to sites taking 100 kW or less. In April 1998—in just over two years' time—the franchise will be ended, and all customers, including domestic customers, will have a choice of supplier. Within the franchise market, electricity prices are controlled by the DGES.

The price of electricity is made up of four elements: first, the wholesale purchase cost of the electricity to the REC, which the REC may pass through to the retail price; secondly, the cost of transmitting the electricity from the generating station, through the National Grid's transmission system, to the REC's system of wires; thirdly, the cost of distributing the electricity over the REC's system, which accounts for some 25 per cent. of the electricity price, and has been subject to price controls that have required real price decreases in this component of the final electricity price; and, fourthly, the fossil fuel levy and value added tax.

The final cost of the electricity used by the hon. Gentleman's constituents reflects all four of these elements. Even taking VAT into account, real domestic electricity prices are no higher than they were before privatisation—since privatisation, they have fallen by about 7 per cent., excluding VAT.

There are further decreases to come. As we all know, domestic customers of the RECs have received a one-off discount of £50 on their electricity bills under the terms of the flotation of the National Grid in December. The tightening of the distribution price control, announced by the Director General of Electricity Supply in July 1995, will bring a 3 per cent. reduction in real electricity prices as from 1 April. The reduction in the rate of the fossil fuel levy at the time of privatisation of the nuclear generating stations will bring another further significant reduction in electricity prices later this year.

The main point raised by the hon. Member for North Cornwall concerned regional variations in electricity prices. In the context of the elements that I have just enumerated, that means the distribution and transmission price controls; and there is a link with transmission losses, so I shall say a few words about that.

There is nothing too surprising about the existence of regional variations in prices; indeed, regional price variations are to be found in commodities separate from electricity. They can be found in such things as tea and houses, and they are a natural and unsurprising consequence of underlying regional differences in market conditions. There is not too much that anyone can do about the geographical and demographic conditions that push up supply costs to the more remote and sparsely populated regions of the isles. Against the background set by the differences, however, it is important that the severity of regulation should take into account, case by case, the extent of the scope for cost reduction in different areas.

Consequently, the director general sets the distribution price control separately for each of the 12 RECs. The revised controls that he announced last summer mean that the aggregate required reduction in the distribution charges by South Western Electricity over the period 1994-95 to 1999-2000 will be nearly one third in real terms—to be precise, 30 per cent. Some other RECs have had more severe reductions while others have had smaller ones.

At present, electricity transmission losses are charged on a uniform basis throughout the country. However, annual rates for transmission losses have increased by about £30 million in the past few years and the director general has said that customers would get a better deal if charges for transmission were more cost-reflective—that is, if they related more closely to the typical distances that

[Mr. Richard Page]

electricity must travel from generator to customer. That is part of the point that the hon. Member for North Cornwall made.

A more cost-reflective basis of charging would bring reductions in charges to some, but the reverse side of the coin, fairly obviously, is that Professor Littlechild has acknowledged that it would mean increases to others. He said, however, that any such increases in transmission charges should not exceed 12 per cent. of the electricity price in any region and would be more than offset by the reduction in charges to those customers resulting from the implementation of the new distribution price controls.

Professor Littlechild has commented—this returns to one of the points that the hon. Member for North Cornwall made—that customers alone should not bear those charges. He said:

"Generators should also share the charge for transmission losses, since the most important single need is to inform decisions on the location of new generation".

Within government, that is a matter for the director general. He has called on the electricity pool to make proposals by the end of the month. The director general has suggested that if the pool considers that it cannot deal adequately with transmission losses by that time, it should transfer responsibility to the National Grid so that necessary arrangements can be put into effect in good time. That brings me, as night follows day, to the subject of transmission price control.

The original transmission price control covered the period from 1990 to 1993, and restrained the National Grid's average regulated revenue per kilowatt to increase by no more than the rate of inflation. In 1992, the Director General of Electricity Supply reviewed that control, and tightened it to "RPI minus 3" for three years as from April 1993. That means that the National Grid's average regulated revenue per kilowatt has had to reduce in real terms by 3 per cent. a year for three years. Those effects are all reflected in the present electricity price level, and they will bring a further decrease in transmission charges as from this April.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Page: I do not mind briefly giving way, but if I cannot finish my speech it will be on the hon. Gentleman's head.

Mr. Harvey: The Minister is referring to overall reductions in transmissions. He said that other commodities show a price differential between regions, as though that were an act of God over which there was no control. Does he accept that, because the transmission part of the electricity industry remains a monopoly, it is a matter of policy whether there is economic costing, differentiating by region, or whether the costs are shared equally, as they have been until now? That is a matter of policy that might be controlled.

Mr. Page: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but as I said at the outset, the director general has been given specific tasks to achieve and—in being given those tasks—he has also been given a certain independence. If someone is given independence, he or she is expected to exercise it. Therefore the arguments to the director general have to be advanced; much of what I have said tonight shows that so much of the decision making will be in the director general's hands.

In November, the DGES began to consider the revised transmission price control to apply from 1 April 1997. He issued a consultation paper and asked for comments by the end of January. I understand that the DGES hopes to announce the revised control later this year and that it will take effect from 1 April 1997. That is a matter for the DGES. An important aspect of the regulatory system—introduced at the time of privatisation—is that the DGES is independent. His statutory duties include protecting the interests of the customer and promoting efficiency and economy on the part of the electricity licensees.

The hon. Gentleman has already expressed his concerns fairly forcefully, and I am sure that he will state them in writing to the DGES. I shall draw the contents of the debate to the attention of the DGES and flag up the hon. Gentleman's concerns. My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Hicks) has also made his views known to me. I advise the hon. Member for North Cornwall to lobby the director general enthusiastically so that he may take into account those views when he conducts the review of electricity transmission charges.

Question put and agreed to. Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 13 March 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Intergovernmental Conference

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for granting this important debate this morning. I feel enormously privileged to open the first of two debates on the White Paper on the intergovernmental conference. As we all know, the IGC is scheduled to start its deliberations on 29 March and, in the intervening period, right hon. and hon. Members will have the opportunity to form opinions about whether the negotiating position set out in the White Paper reflects their aspirations for the future of the European Community and, more to the point, their aspirations for the future of the country to which we all belong and to whose sovereign we have all sworn an oath of allegiance.

It is a sad commentary on our times that, at this defining moment in our nation's history, the White Paper makes but a passing reference to the single currency, which is pivotal to the debate about the future of the Community.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): That has nothing to do with the IGC.

Mr. Gill: Doubtless that is because the Government believe, or have been pressured into believing, that economic and monetary union do not lead to political union. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, when he replies to the debate, will confirm or deny that the statement made to me by the Economic Secretary in her letter of 15 February—that

"any move to monetary union . . . does not necessitate political union"—

is an accurate representation of Government thinking.

Mr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose—*

Mr. Gill: I intend to give way to hon. Members, and I notice that two of my colleagues wish to intervene. I wish to reach the end of my first section and then I will give way. I have a long speech to make and I do not wish to prolong the debate unduly.

Notwithstanding the answer to my question that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will give the House, let me remind him that there is a strong and growing body of opinion in Parliament and in the country that will not accept the abolition of the pound sterling and the consequences that must inevitably stem from that decision. So the second question my hon. Friend must answer, assuming that the Economic Secretary's statement is correct, is how the Government will persuade the people of this country that they have genuinely set their faces against political union.

Mr. Marlow: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way to me because I may be able to answer the question that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) tried to put. From a sedentary position, he suggested that monetary union was nothing to do with the IGC. The IGC is about any reform of or changes required to the Maastricht treaty, and half of the treaty is to do with monetary union. Therefore, monetary union is a proper subject to discuss at the IGC.

Mr. Gill: I agree with my hon. Friend and I hope that he has satisfactorily dealt with the point that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) made from a sedentary position.

I remind my hon. Friend the Minister that I asked whether the advice that I have been given by the Economic Secretary is correct and, if it is correct, how we will persuade the great British public that economic and monetary union does not lead on to political union. When he answers that second question, may I urge my hon. Friend to recognise the fact that we are long past the point at which mere rhetoric will satisfy the voters, because for 25 years or more they have been duped and deceived by politicians whose hidden agenda is only now revealed? My hon. Friend must explain how, in logic, it is possible for a nation to surrender its currency without at the same time surrendering its sovereignty. Without a satisfactory answer to those questions, the House is entitled to conclude that the end game—as many of us have long suspected—is not a Europe of nation states, but a totally integrated United States of Europe. Why else is it that Governments have signed not one but three significant treaties, all of which have imposed ever-increasing hegemony on Europe? I trust that the Minister will answer that question too.

I turn next to the submissions that Ministers have received in advance of yesterday's publication of the White Paper. Quite apart from representations from individual Members of Parliament, my hon. Friend will also be aware of the papers submitted by the Conservative 2000 group, the British committee of the European Research Group—comprising 12 right hon. and hon. Members—and the group of eight Conservative Members from whom the party Whip was withdrawn on 28 November 1994, because of their refusal to support a Government motion to send an additional £75 million to Brussels. I trust that the Minister will not be dismissive of the views expressed in those submissions, and that he will not underestimate the huge body of public opinion that supports them—a body of opinion that will be profoundly disappointed by the Government's failure to produce proposals for treaty amendments.

Although I welcome the modest objectives that Ministers have set themselves, I will not be alone in expressing the view that failure to identify treaty changes will come to be regarded as a missed opportunity to recover competences that should never have been given away in the first place. While I am grateful that Her Majesty's Government have acceded to the request from the so-called Euro-rebels for a White Paper, I hope against hope that the statement in the conclusions of the White Paper—that the Government are

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still considering their detailed approach—is a sign that Ministers, even at this late stage, are prepared to modify their negotiating stance in the light of today's debate and in the light of the debate that will take place on Thursday week. Perhaps when he sums up the Minister will be kind enough to give me that assurance.

I should like now to draw the House's attention to the submission of the European Commission—

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Gill: I will give way to my hon. Friend provided that he is not going to be a complete nuisance.

Mr. Marlow: I am afraid I am. We dislike party splits, but I am afraid that there is a split between my hon. Friend and me. He says that the Government are not asking for treaty amendments, but in yesterday's statement the Foreign Secretary said:

"The Government do not believe that directives, once enacted, are irreversible, and will press for treaty amendment if that proves to be the best way".—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1996; Vol. 273, c. 786.]

Mr. Gill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that error in my speech.

The submission by the European Commission is entitled "Reinforcing Political Union and Preparing for Enlargement". On the very first page of the document it is unequivocally stated in paragraph 2 that since 1993 the member states have adopted and given effect to the treaty on European union, which derives from

"a broad, twofold aspiration: a determination to extract all the positive effects of the internal market by adding to it a single currency . . . and . . . to give the union a genuine political dimension".

Later, in paragraph 6, it is stated that

"the deepening and widening of the Union are intertwined."

Barring the odd detail here and there, the Commission's opinion probably reflects the views of a majority of the member states. It is instructive, therefore, to compare it point by point with our Government's White Paper. The Commission says, for example, that there should be a stronger role for the European Court of Justice. If there is one special disappointment in the White Paper, it is that Her Majesty's Government's stated position on the ECJ is far less robust than we had expected. My hon. Friend, the Minister will not be surprised to hear me say that the House will want to examine the Government's proposals for reform of the European Court in some considerable detail when the promised memorandum is eventually published.

The Commission states:

"The social dimension should be one of the central themes at the Conference".

On the other hand, Her Majesty's Government make it clear beyond all reasonable doubt that they will not accept the social chapter, when they state that

"the United Kingdom will not give up its opt-out and cannot be forced to do so".

The Commission says that

"it should have the power of initiative in all fields."

Our Government say that

"the EU is not a state and should take care not to develop ideas that feed people's fears"—

they are real fears—

"that it has a vocation to become one."

In this connection I welcome the statement that the Government are considering ideas for limiting the scope for Community action in certain areas—in particular, to prevent the health and safety article being used for social policy by the back door. What a hollow ring that statement has in the light of yesterday's recommendation by the Advocate General concerning the working time directive; and what a vindication for all of us who have been warning the Government that Britain's opt-out from the social chapter would be circumvented in precisely this way.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and I am sure that my he, like me, will welcome the fact that after a number of outrageous and deeply offensive decisions by the European Court of Justice and the—entirely separate—European Court of Human Rights, Her Majesty's Government are at last facing up to these matters. I hope, however, that my hon. Friend will spell out what further practical measures he would like HMG to adopt in this respect, because I foresee difficulties.

Mr. Gill: I am grateful for that important point. There is increasing resentment among the people whom we represent at the ever-increasing number of decisions taken by this people's Parliament which have been overturned by the European Court of Justice. Many of us, like my hon. Friend, feel very strongly about that—as I am sure the Government know.

The Commission believes that

"there should be a transfer of justice and home affairs to the Community framework."

That stands in complete contrast—to answer my hon. Friend's point—with what is advocated by the Government, who seek

"a greater role for national Parliaments in the justice and home affairs pillar."

Similarly, the Commission says that the contents of the Schengen agreement should be incorporated in the treaty; but Her Majesty's Government have refused to accept that agreement. The whole House will welcome the renewed commitment to the third pillar given in paragraph 49, and the pledge in paragraph 51 to

"take whatever steps are needed to maintain our frontier controls".

On foreign policy, the Commission says that

"the Union must be able to present a united front."

Her Majesty's Government say, quite rightly, that

"the common foreign and security policy can never become an exclusive policy that would replace national foreign policy. The Commission takes the view that qualified majority voting should be the norm for the CFSP. The British Government do not accept that the unanimity provisions for the CFSP constitute a restriction on its development, or that it would be strengthened by the introduction of voting models that overrode the key concerns of member states."

Still on the subject of external relations, the Commission believes that a proper common foreign and security policy should also extend to common defence, and that this requires the better integration of the armaments industry in the general treaty rules. The Government's oft repeated view is that

"decisions on defence policy should remain where they belong—with sovereign nation states".

I am quite sure that the House welcomes that adamant statement in the White Paper.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): While I agree that we should welcome the Government's commitment to maintaining our border controls, will my hon. Friend make it clear to the House and the country that if the European Court of Justice tells us that we cannot maintain those controls any longer, there will be nothing the Government can do about it?

Mr. Gill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for adding to the burden of my submission.

Still on the question of defence, all the lessons of history demonstrate that it is quite right and proper for Britain to take the view that she does—that decisions on defence policy should remain with nation states. It must be made clear to our European partners that anything which takes away from or undermines NATO is simply not acceptable. The White Paper commitment that any review of article J4

"should aim to reinforce NATO as the bedrock of European security"

is most welcome; as is the statement that it would be inappropriate for the Commission, the European Parliament or the European Court of Justice to have any role in defence decision making.

On voting procedure,

"the Commission . . . proposes that qualified majority voting becomes the general rule".

Her Majesty's Government are opposed to further extension of qualified majority voting.

Finally, the Commission concludes by advocating

"the shift to a more genuinely Political Union"—

a determination powerfully articulated only yesterday by Messrs Maartens and Santer, who make no secret of the fact that the pre-eminent objective in Europe remains, as it always has been, political union.

Throughout the 20 pages of the Commission's opinion, I can find only three phrases with which I can agree: first, its conclusion that

"this debate must be opened up at once, in order to give the negotiators their bearings";

secondly, its opinion that

"Europe must do less, so as to do it better";

and, thirdly, its statement that

"only a competitive economy can create lasting jobs"—

platitudes that are practically meaningless in the circumstances in which the voice of the people has either been ignored, as in the case of the first Danish referendum on Maastricht, or not even sought, as in our own case; circumstances in which all the indications are that far from doing less the Commission continually seeks to do more, as evidenced by the opinion to the IGC from which I have quoted; and circumstances in which whole industries face an uncertain future due to the overweening interference of a bureaucracy in Brussels that has an interventionist approach to economic affairs which is totally at odds with the policies of our Conservative Government.

The prospects of the United Kingdom getting satisfaction in almost any subject area are, on any rational analysis of the evidence available, remote. Our objectives, as I have demonstrated, are in many instances totally opposed to those of the Commission. We are poles apart. It is unlikely that other member states will take our part, and on the basis of past performance I am sad to say that it is highly probable that we shall seek to appease and compromise rather than challenge and confront.

But there are those of us who believe that some good could come out of the IGC if instead of playing on our weaknesses we played to our strengths. Having already given so much away—our fishing rights are a good example of this—we have little to barter with, but in that context I should remind Ministers that although I welcomed the commitment to end the abuse of quota hoppers, nothing short of the restoration of full national control over our exclusive fishing zone will satisfy the fishing industry and those of our constituents who are equally incensed by the common fisheries policy.

The time has come for us forcefully to remind our European partners that we in the United Kingdom contribute 60 per cent. of the EU fish stocks, that we are a net importer of goods from other countries in Europe, and that with Germany we effectively bankroll the rest of the Community. At the end of the day, we have a veto and we must not be afraid to use it.

I conclude by saying what I have said on so many occasions. In the final analysis, if we cannot get a deal that protects British interests and is acceptable to the majority of the British people, Her Majesty's Government must be prepared to get up from the conference table and walk away. Taking the lead in Europe is not about rushing to the head of a queue that is going up a cul-de-sac. It is about persuading Europe's political elite that the whole concept of European Union is doomed to failure unless they can carry the people with them.

Once again, it is Britain's historic destiny to champion the cause of freedom and guide our European partners away from the totalitarianism that threatens to engulf them. I urge the whole House, in giving our negotiators their bearings for the forthcoming IGC, to make clear its opposition to political union and, indeed, to any other proposal that would lead to that same conclusion.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West) *rose*—

Mr. Gill: It is most unfair of the hon. Gentleman to interrupt my peroration, but as I have not given way to the Opposition, I gladly do so now.

Mr. Randall: Did I hear the hon. Gentleman clearly? Did he say that the British Government should walk out of the IGC?

Mr. Gill: Yes, indeed he did. I very much take the view that the British Government must approach the IGC as hard-nosed business men. They have to strike a bargain there, not to please the Foreign Office or the Front Bench but to please this Parliament and the people. It will not work if they do not. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, as it gave me the opportunity to make that very important point. Sadly, the House lacks people with experience of having to strike bargains. It seems to me that the history of our overseas negotiations in the post-war

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period is to approach negotiations in a spirit of compromise. "We have to get a deal" is the attitude that seems to pervade the Foreign Office. I do not share that attitude. I feel most strongly, as do many of my constituents, that unless we can get a deal that is good for Britain, good for British industry, good for Britain's farmers, and good for Britain's fishermen, we cannot afford to sign up any further.

I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister will recognise that, in not going far enough with the White Paper—either in the direction of our European partners on the one hand; or, on the other, in the direction of British public opinion—the Government risk falling between two stools. At the end of the day, I trust that Ministers will recognise the inescapable reality that in all these matters it is British voters who will have the final say. I am quite sure that my hon. Friend the Minister, who is an astute politician, will recognise that fact.

9.55 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on persuading you, Madam Speaker, to allow us to have this debate. It is timely—

Madam Speaker: The debate was won by ballot. It has nothing whatever to do with me.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am sorry about that. That is why I have always been polite to you, Madam Speaker. I was always living in hope that I might succeed.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on this timely debate. I am pleased to take part, as a large number of us will be squeezed out of the main debate on the IGC White Paper to be held a little later. It should be a two-day debate, not a one-day debate, but I guess that the powers that be on the two Front Benches will concoct that it will be a one-day debate. We shall see.

I approach the debate as someone who describes himself as a European. I believe in the concept of the European Union. I was keen to contest European elections long before it was fashionable in the Labour party to do so. I make that declaration. I have spoken before in the House about the need for the whole-hearted consent of Parliament and the people to any further integration or treaty arrangements. Therefore, if there was to be any significant constitutional change following the IGC, it should be put to the people by referendum.

I do not argue for a referendum as a political expedient, which is why the Prime Minister is now contemplating one in order to get himself off a dangerous hook, or indeed which was the motive of Harold Wilson. I believe that referendums are a good practice in our democratic processes. We should have referendums more often where there are constitutional changes. I would like to see legislation that would allow Madam Speaker to decide that matters that were of paramount importance relating to the constitution were subject to ratification by the people. I believe that that is what should happen with regard to this and other important matters.

I believe that the IGC will soon discover that there is limited scope for deepening the Community. That may be a good thing. Public opinion, not just in this country but elsewhere in western Europe, needs a few years—perhaps a decade or more—to digest what has been a rapid change in the European Union. There needs to be consolidation, a bedding down, before people, Parliaments or Governments contemplate any major changes.

I shall deal with an issue that is often thrown across the Chamber, that somehow my party is federalist whereas the Conservative party is not. That is absolute rubbish. I have never heard or known of a Labour Member who is a federalist. I have noticed, however, that there are always at least two or three federalists on the Conservative Benches—I notice that they are not in their place this morning, but hon. Members will know precisely who I mean—those who are prepared to contemplate a formal European Union on a federal basis. The federalists are on the Conservative Benches. That needs to be made quite clear.

For me, a priority is not the deepening but the widening of the Community. A historic window of political opportunity is open to us—the opportunity to entrench, preserve and promote the emerging and, in some cases, delicate democracies of central Europe. I see membership of the European Union as part of that. I would give a great deal to bring Poland in particular, Hungary, the Czech Republic—the Visegrad countries—and some other states into the Union—and, for that matter, NATO—as soon as possible.

I was somewhat irritated by the Government's failure officially to mark the 50th anniversary of Winston Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri. It was wrong on a number of counts to abdicate that to Lady Thatcher. I mentioned the speech in the Chamber some months ago, and also asked the Foreign Office to mark the anniversary officially. Let us remind ourselves of what was said in 1945: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across Europe behind which we must refer to it as, the Soviet sphere."

For half a century we have been saying to the countries of central Europe, "Look over the wall. See how wonderful things are in the west." Anyone who believed our propaganda would think that the sun always shone and the rain never fell in western Europe. What happened then? Communism collapsed, the wall came down and those countries asked, not unreasonably, "Can we join the club?" We said, "Hang on a moment. There are a good many things to decide."

I do not want to minimise the hurdles that stand in the way of facilitating the entry of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and other states into the European Union, but our moral obligation is not being recognised by our Government and, perhaps, others. There is an urgent need for us to fulfil duties of which we spoke for over 50 years, and which constituted the raison d'être for the cold war. Now we are trying to find excuses to keep those countries out, which is entirely wrong. I stand by the commitment made at Fulton: we should not now concede, instead of a Soviet, a Russian sphere of influence. There should be no Russian veto on the legitimate aspirations of free democratic countries.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: No, I will not. Time is limited. Moreover, the hon. Lady speaks about Europe a great deal, whereas I do not speak about it very often.

Page 9 of the White Paper states that Parliament must approve any new treaty that emerges from the IGC. May I ask the Minister whether that constitutes a change of policy on the part of Her Majesty's Government? One point on which I agree with some Conservative Members is that our Parliament is always denied the right to approve treaties. We approved legislation subsequent to the Maastricht treaty rather than approving the treaty itself. Is it true that our Parliament will approve our treaty accession if a new one emerges from the IGC? If so, I welcome that, but, if not, the Minister should clearly state that we will not have such an opportunity, and that approval will be given by means of the royal prerogative. That would be entirely wrong: treaties should be approved by the legislature, as they are in other countries.

On page 15 of the White Paper, a great deal of humbug is spoken about the role of national Parliaments in relation to the business of the European Union. Having been in the House for nearly four years, I must say that I think that the way in which we scrutinise European legislation is a sham. This lovely Parliament, of which I am proud to be a Member, needs to crank up its machinery so that we can probe and criticise European legislation much more effectively. It is interesting to note that European Standing Committees A and B sit in Committee Rooms where there are no television cameras. I think that television is an important part of scrutiny. Everything is loaded against the possibility of holding a full debate and public understanding of what is going on. Parliament should be much more proactive, and should be able to initiate developments in Europe; but there is no real scope for that here.

Paragraph 30 of the White Paper, on page 15, refers to new competences, and mentions areas of competence that the Government do not think it appropriate to cede to the European Union. I shall not comment on what is said there, but I note what has been omitted. I am interested to note that there is no reference to aviation policy, airports and air traffic control. Do Her Majesty's Government concede that such matters are to be a European competence? As it happens, I think that that is inevitable and might even be a good thing, but I should like to know the position. If it is not the case, however, the Government clearly needed my assistance when preparing the White Paper, because they overlooked these matters.

The White Paper makes great play of the size of the Commission. I do not understand why that is a big issue. As I have said, I look forward to enlargement. I suspect that some small states will join the Union in the not too distant future; I accept that not every state should necessarily be able to nominate a Commissioner, but certain portfolios such as transport and foreign affairs can clearly be broken down, in the case of transport, into various forms of transport, and in the case of foreign affairs, into geographical areas. All Parliaments have junior Ministers. I know that Commissioners are not the equivalent of Ministers, but surely enough portfolios are available for each country to be able to nominate a Commissioner or an assistant Commissioner.

The White Paper makes various suggestions about how progress should be made as enlargement continues, and they are worthy of consideration. As I have said, I do not think that there is much scope for change. Existing arrangements should be allowed to bed down; by and large, qualified majority voting should remain as it is now.

Euro-sceptics have repeatedly referred to the decisions of the European Court, but the White Paper reveals that its judgments have gone against the United Kingdom on relatively few occasions. I do not say that; the Government do. We must see the position in perspective. On occasion the United Kingdom errs in its interpretation of European Union treaties, and it is in the nature of court cases that we are sometimes disappointed. You win some, you lose some.

It should be said that some recent judgments are very welcome, because they will protect workers. It should also be said that Ministers who go on about resisting the social chapter are talking absolute rot. In this regard, I probably agree with some Conservative Members. As sure as night follows day, much of what is in the social chapter will be conceded by the Government. They will huff and puff, and pretend that it is all the doing of a load of judges in Europe, but they will concede it. I welcome that; I part company with my Essex colleagues who disapprove of it. We can agree, however, that the Government's protestations of innocence are cosmetic rubbish. Inexorably changes will come about that will improve the lives of working people, increasing their capacity to shape, influence and have access to developments that affect their working lives.

The White Paper is silent on two issues. One is the size of the European Parliament. I believe that there should be a European Parliament, although I do not think that its powers should be significantly increased. It has an important role and function, but, if enlargement takes place in the Community, it is absurd that it should continue to grow. It already has 670-odd Members; I think that it is already too large. The IGC should decide to "downsize" it.

I realise that there is a problem in relation to Luxembourg, but exceptions can be made. Luxembourg was in at the beginning: it is a foundation member, and its number of Members of the European Parliament should therefore be protected. However, the size of the European Parliament should be capped. Its membership should certainly not be enlarged, and I think it should be gradually reduced. That might also push us, and other countries, into thinking in terms of an alternative voting system for Ministers of the European Parliament that reflects views in this country. I welcomed and played a full part in the Labour party's great win in the last European elections, but clearly Labour's representation in the European Parliament is disproportionate to its electoral vote. Conversely, in 1979, when my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) was first elected to the European Parliament, Labour was substantially disadvantaged because of the crackpot electoral voting procedures for the European Parliament. That should be changed and the number of Members of the European Parliament should be reduced. The Parliament is also extremely costly.

There is a danger of the European Parliament becoming an absurd assembly moving between Brussels and Strasbourg. The Government should tackle the nonsense of there being sessions in Strasbourg. The only logical place for it to meet is Brussels, to which Members of this Parliament should have access. I know why the Government do this—

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 15 minutes.

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman says that I have been speaking for a quarter of an hour, but he speaks time

[Mr. Mackinlay]

after time on Europe and I know what he is going to say—he is like a long-playing gramophone record. Now it is the turn of the hon. Member for Thurrock to have his say on Europe. I want to give a balanced view on the way in which we should proceed. Nevertheless, I take the hon. Gentleman's point, and I promise that, if he does not interrupt me again, I will conclude my speech more quickly.

If the European Parliament was in Brussels, we could go there more and understand more of what is going on. More facilities to travel to Brussels should be available to hon. Members than the one absurd concession a year, which is no good. I want to understand what is going on to be able to probe, examine and check up what is being discussed.

If there is enlargement, we must stop additional languages being made official European Community languages each time a new country joins. It is crazy. In many cases, applicant members that join the European Union will be prepared to use English or other existing official languages. There is considerable language competence elsewhere. Many people in applicant countries can speak other principal languages of the European Union. The cost and the bureaucracy is so absurd that we must say, "Enough." That should be one of the prices of new countries acceding to the European Union.

If those countries find that uncomfortable, we must say to them that, if, after they become members, they want their language to be an official language, they must pay the total cost involved, in addition to their normal contributions to European Union costs. I think they would consider that to be an absurd and unnecessary additional cost, and that is why the number of official languages should now be capped.

The real decisions will have to be taken by my hon. Friends when they are in government. The conclusion of the IGC will mean that a Labour Government will be at the helm. I hope that they will realise that Europe is universally popular in this country, provided that there are no great concessions or that further tranches of sovereignty and this Parliament's capacity to control things are not lost. I hope that they will accept that treaties should be ratified by the House and that they should make institutional arrangements whereby this Parliament can improve its capacity to probe, examine and be proactive on European matters.

Above all, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East will acknowledge the overwhelming and legitimate case for central European countries to join the European Union and NATO, which is referred to in the White Paper. That case is compelling. We should recognise it as a moral issue, an obligation and a matter of our own self-interest.

10.13 am

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on his foresight and on his fortune in instituting this timely debate, which gives not only the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) but me an opportunity to get in a word on Europe. Like him, that is not something that I do frequently, in contrast with some of my hon. Friends.

I agree with the hon. Member for Thurrock about widening rather than deepening the European Union, although I would not go along with all that he said. As to whether the Labour party is federalist or more federalist than the Conservative party or some individuals in it, I draw attention not only to the social chapter but to several other items on the European Commission's wish list, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow set out in detail, and which the Labour party supports.

Those items include the size of the European Commission. Unlike the Government, the hon. Member for Thurrock wants a larger Commission. That should not surprise us. The shadow Government is a good deal larger than the actual Government. There are more appointments in the shadow Government.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am not in it.

Sir John Cope: I know, but more people are appointed to the shadow Government than to the actual Government. That will cause a bit of pain if the Labour party ever forms a Government, but never mind—that is the position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow quoted extensively from the Commission's wish list at the start of the great process of the intergovernmental conference. I recall the start of the last IGC and the atmosphere then. Many continental politicians thought that Europe would take great leaps towards federalism. They confidently expected that foreign affairs, defence, home affairs and justice would become Community matters in the full sense. The Germans were not just paying by far the biggest share of the Community's costs but happy to do so and to pay more. In effect, no one else except the United Kingdom was making a substantial financial contribution to the Community's costs.

The British Government were therefore faced with considerable difficulties at the start of last IGC, but, as we know, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleagues blocked all the worst federalist proposals. They were extremely successful in the negotiations and all the alarmist talk at the beginning was not justified. My right hon. Friend won or reserved the UK's position on all the important points by quietly and firmly saying no and by arguing the case in detail. He did not have a great showdown or walk out; he argued his case in his own effective manner. That is what he will do again with his colleagues.

The White Paper puts the issues and the British position with great clarity and firmness, which is the right thing to do as we approach the IGC. I welcome the fact that it has been published. I am sure that it will be studied carefully throughout Europe in all the Foreign Ministries and that it will be a useful basic document to refer back to as events proceed.

The atmosphere this time is different from that at the beginning of the last IGC. The political atmosphere, the economic background and the financial position have changed. In many respects, the Commission's wish list is not too dissimilar from the wish list of those people at the beginning of the last IGC, but the background is different.

On the political position, obviously, some of the principal characters have left the scene, notably President Mitterrand and Jacques Delors. Chancellor Kohl is still in power, although he escaped defeat by a small margin at the last elections. He has, however, begun to shift his position.

That is evidenced by the speech that is quoted on page 4 of the White Paper and to which reference was made yesterday—one of several speeches in which he has placed a slightly different emphasis.

Recently, the socialists have been defeated in Spain. Since the last IGC, everyone has lived with the problems of ratification—not only hon. Members, who dealt with them at some length, but some of the other countries in the Community, notably France and Denmark. The political background, therefore, is different in relation to Governments and public opinion in Europe.

Economically, the position is also different. Problems of recession have arisen across the Community and are still much more obvious in countries on the continent than in the UK, which is further forward in coming out of the recession and building its prosperity.

It is already becoming absolutely clear that economic and monetary union cannot be achieved in the way envisaged in the Maastricht treaty. Of course, in view of the currency markets, Finance Ministers are bound to keep talking about sticking to the timetable and the criteria—such phrases are still used throughout Europe. The truth is that we cannot do both: we can have a timetable for some sort of union or co-operation if we wish or we can stick to the Maastricht criteria.

Mr. Randall *rose—*

Sir John Cope: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way as a number of hon. Members wish to speak and time is limited.

We cannot have both the timetable and the criteria, so renegotiation is inevitable. The ultimate proof of that is Belgium, which can never fulfil the criteria within the timetable; it will need decades more. That puts the whole of Benelux in doubt. I accept that, if the criteria were to be waived or altered, it might be possible to proceed on a different basis—but it would be a basis different from that envisaged at Maastricht. Renegotiation will become essential.

The financial position of the Community has changed completely. Germany is the biggest single financier of the Community, but its finances have come under strain since the last IGC and it is extremely conscious of that. Germans are still paying an additional 10 per cent. tax to cover the costs of the reunification of eastern and western Germany. They also have to pay a premium on their bond rates for three or more years because of the possibility that those loans will be repaid in a different currency from the mark. Those considerations will bear harder and harder on, first, the Bundesbank and then on German financial thinking. Germany has become much more reluctant to continue to finance the Community with a more or less blank cheque.

The Dutch are now having to pay heavily into European Union coffers—more heavily per head of population than Britain, I believe. No one is more conscious of that than their Prime Minister, Wim Kok, a former Finance Minister with whom I had to deal during the former British presidency when I was President of the Budget Council.

At that time, the French were beginning to be on our side because their bills were getting bigger. Since then, they have had tremendous difficulties with their economic policy and a change of Government. The socialists were defeated in the presidential elections—and, indeed, looked like being defeated so far in advance that Mr. Delors withdrew from standing, as he had been expected to do and had appeared to be making moves towards doing. The Italians are having to pay more and are worried about that—and who would not be, given their financial position?

The result is that the whole discussion of EU finances takes place against a background very different from a few years ago. That puts the squeeze on the common agricultural policy.

Sir Teddy Taylor: It is going up.

Sir John Cope: My hon. Friend is right to say that the CAP has gone up; it will do so again. Nevertheless, the different background to Community finances is a lever that will help to reform the CAP. In order to work, any lever needs a fulcrum, which in this case is expansion to include the countries of eastern Europe. We all recognise that it is impossible to widen the Community without reform of the CAP. That is also recognised on the continent and it will lead to reform in due course.

Another aspect is the home affairs pillar. It was and remains important to keep that as an intergovernmental matter. We must build on operational and intelligence co-operation between the police, the customs services and other agencies across the borders—not just within the EU, but much more widely. European terrorism is one matter; European organised crime is another within Europe, but it has a much wider base than that so co-operation needs to be very wide.

The home affairs pillar cannot be put within the framework of the treaty of Rome. No country would entrust the operational control of its police force to that sort of framework, not least those countries with close land borders. Britain is primarily an island, but we have a border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. I have some experience of that border and I know how difficult co-operation across it can be. The considerations for the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ministers dealing with policing matters north of the border are different from those of the Garda and Irish Ministers who must deal with those matters south of the border.

I am not for one moment criticising the co-operation we received from the Irish; on the contrary, we had some very good co-operation for much of the time. However, their operational considerations were different from ours—and, sadly, still are. That is one, admittedly acute, example of the differences in policing either side of a land border. A sea border makes it easier, but there are land borders across most of the continent. As part of the changed atmosphere, countries have had to face the increasing problem of immigration and asylum seekers, and nowhere more so than Germany.

I want to say a few words about referendums. Sir James Goldsmith, a French Member of the European Parliament, has written to many of us calling for a referendum in Britain on the Maastricht treaty. It is far too late for that. Whatever the arguments were for such a referendum, they were made some time ago. Much of the outcome of the Maastricht negotiations was, in any case, favourable. If there were a referendum, the voters would have to consider all sorts of matters, both favourable and otherwise. It would be difficult to frame a question on the Maastricht treaty as a whole.

[Sir John Cope]

It is quite different to talk about a future referendum on a single currency, but that is not what Sir James is calling for in his letter. If ever a single currency became reality—I have already expressed doubt about that—it would be a long way off. It will be the result of many complex considerations at that time. It may be desirable to hold a referendum before clinching the matter because undoubtedly, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, it will have political and constitutional implications. Given that we do not know how negotiations will go, except that they will not follow the pattern set out at Maastricht, I see very little point in a more firm opinion being given at the present time.

All in all, the White Paper is very positive. It sets out a practical approach to the IGC, which I welcome. The tide of opinion is running in the same direction on the continent as it has been in this country, to a much greater extent than before. We are therefore well placed to get a good result from the IGC.

10.30 am

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): From where I stand, the approach of the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) is wholly negative, and compares, as the European Commission said, predictably with the Government's largely negative White Paper. I am getting rather tired of all this rubbish about hidden agendas. I have fought nine elections and never concealed my belief in a federal Europe. It is simply not true that we engage in all sorts of fancy scheming. I say positively and clearly that I do not fear a federal Europe; it is an ideal to which I aspire.

The hon. Member for Ludlow opened his speech with a few remarks on the single currency, which will not, as we know, be dealt with at the intergovernmental conference. I agree with him that it is, however, behind the whole argument. Perhaps he has not noticed the most recent information about business attitudes to a single currency. A report published earlier in the year by Coopers and Lybrand found that 57 per cent. of British businesses favoured a single currency. The hon. Gentleman might take that into account. A single currency and a single market are no more than common sense, and business men, many of whom support his Government, clearly recognise that. I doubt very much that business men in Ludlow think differently from those anywhere else. They may simply like the hon. Gentleman and thole his eccentricities, but he should not assume that they all agree with him. I am sure that they do not agree with the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow).

Mr. Gill: Does the hon. Gentleman think that there is any significance in the pronouncements of Professor Otmar Issing, who, as he knows, is a director of the Bundesbank? He is apparently on record as saying that monetary union could destroy the European Union.

Sir Russell Johnston: I have just visited the Federal Republic of Germany. That view, if it is quoted accurately—I have a feeling that it is somewhat out of context—was not held by any part of the German political establishment, including the Social Democratic party.

One passage of the speech of the hon. Member for Ludlow reflected the weakness and the negative nature of the Euro-sceptic attitude. I do not think that there is a Euro-sceptic case at all. The hon. Gentleman—I do not think that I am quoting him accurately, but he is present and can correct me if I am wrong—said that the Government should challenge and confront rather than compromise and reconcile at the IGC. If it is necessary, he said—there was an intervention at that point—they should walk out. Such rigid, confrontational politics is bad and one of the major weaknesses of the British political system. It is reflected in the House and maintained by an unfair and undemocratic electoral system. I am therefore afraid that I do not think that that is a good way in which to approach anything.

The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) quoted Chancellor Kohl and said that he thought that his attitude was changing. I had an hour with Chancellor Kohl on Monday night and saw absolutely no evidence of such a change. He was still very much convinced that the only sensible thing for the European countries to do was to come closer together. He could not understand the arguments for pulling the countries apart, creating difficulties and erecting barriers. He wanted barriers to be broken down.

I also had the opportunity to speak with others in the Federal Republic's political establishment and one thing that struck me forcefully was their desire to adhere to the economic and monetary union timetable. Personally, I share the views of some that it will not be possible to adhere to such a timetable for a variety of reasons, mainly because the criteria will probably not be met by a number of countries. Nevertheless, I was rebuked quite properly by the chairman of the Christian Democratic Union, who said that if I began by thinking that the timetable could not be met, it never would be met. I had to admit that that was perfectly good logic.

Sir John Cope: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman. A quotation of Chancellor Kohl—he has said similar things on other occasions—is repeated on page 4 of the White Paper, in which he says to the Bundestag:

> "We do not want a centralised European state that subsumes regional, national and cultural traditions or dismisses historical experience."

I do not think that he would have said such things a few years ago and that led me to make my remarks.

Sir Russell Johnston: With great respect, that is completely untrue. Kohl has been saying such things all along; that is his view of federalism. I remember him making a speech at Edinburgh university when he was given an honorary doctorate about six or seven years ago, in which he said that we would have unity in diversity, a federal, decentralised Europe—not a centralised Europe. Kohl has always believed that. It is strange—almost self-inflicted and blind—how many people consider federalism as if it were centralisation; it is not. We gave Germany a federal system because we wanted it to be decentralised. That is why it happened.

I shall conclude because I gather that there is some kind of pact between the two Front-Bench teams that they should deliver of their wisdom shortly. I would not want to prevent that. I shall make four quick points. We believe that qualified majority voting should be extended and that there will not be effective reform of the common agricultural policy, the environment and other matters unless it is. QMV will become even more important if there is enlargement.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Agriculture has majority voting already—now, today.

Sir Russell Johnston: Not in all cases.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I have checked it out and discovered that 98 per cent. of decisions on the CAP are taken by majority voting.

Sir Russell Johnston: I accept—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Sir Russell Johnston: I accept that the majority of decisions are taken by QMV, but, still, some are not.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) said that he wanted the Visegrad countries to join the European Union as quickly as possible. That will be hellishly difficult. Poland, for example, with its textiles, steel and agriculture, could not be taken in before the common agriculture system was reformed. I do not see any great advantage in extending NATO at the moment if its consequence is to alarm Russia. That would not necessarily be a good thing.

Finally, one of the things that we shall have to do very soon is to reform the method of financing the Community. The Germans all said the same. Simply going on with the present system, including the British rebate, is unsatisfactory. We must develop a system that relates capacity to pay more directly to the contribution made. The Government would do us all a great service if they bent their mind in that direction.

10.39 am

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I can assure the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) that, rather than there being some sinister pact, I expect to have the same amount of speaking time as he had. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on his good fortune in winning the ballot and on being able to introduce this subject—but I am not sure whether all his right hon. and hon. Friends will congratulate him in the same way. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) said, the debate is a curtain-raiser for our debate on the White Paper next week.

I was intrigued to hear whether the hon. Member for Ludlow would be pleased with the White Paper that was presented to the House yesterday. The fact that it appeared at all is something of a victory for the hon. Gentleman and his fellow Euro-rebels, because the Government did not originally want to produce a White Paper. None the less, I am sure that much in the document is a disappointment to him. Indeed, at times he described it as "modest" and said that it did not go far enough.

Later in the hon. Gentleman's speech, he seemed to recommend that, if the Minister did not get his way, and did not manage to go even further than the White Paper, he should walk out of the intergovernmental conference. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber talked about hidden agendas. There may be one behind the words "walk out"—that is, withdraw.

Sir Teddy Taylor *indicated assent.*

Ms Quin: The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) obviously agrees with that hidden agenda. It has been behind much of what we have heard this morning.

The White Paper is a strange document, in that it alternates between positive and negative sentences. It is clearly designed to try to appeal to two very different audiences. Its schizophrenic approach is evident in the section that deals with the European Court of Justice. In paragraph 36 we read:

"The Government is committed to a strong independent Court without which it would be impossible to ensure even application of Community law, and to prevent abuse of power by the Community institutions."

At the same time, the White Paper makes an attempt to respond to some of the objections to the recent court decisions about which the hon. Member for Ludlow and his colleagues feel so strongly.

Mr. Marlow: The position is very straightforward. There are some things that Europe has agreed to do, on which the court should adjudicate, and there are some things that Europe has not agreed to do, concerning which the court has acquired powers to itself to make political decisions that should be made in Parliaments within the Union, not by the court. What the Government seek to do, in which we wish them success, is to ensure that the court concentrates on the areas with which it has the proper authority to deal.

Ms Quin: We feel that, in many the cases, some of which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, the court has acted properly. What is straightforward is the split within the Conservative party on the issue. There are some court judgments, whether made by national or by European courts, with which people agree and others with which they do not agree. The Government should be careful about what they propose, because they might end up with a worse situation.

In the White Paper the Government suggest that

"a Member State should only be liable for damages in cases of serious and manifest breach of its obligations".

That could prove a hostage to fortune, because we want many other countries to abide by the obligations that they have entered into. The Government must think the problem through more carefully than they seem to have done so far. We have much to gain if other countries fulfil their obligations, especially on internal market matters.

Finally on the European Court, will the Minister confirm that, when he raised the question in the reflection group, he got no support from any other country? In that case, how does he expect to deliver on the attempts outlined in the White Paper?

One reason why Conservative Members do not like judgments by the European Court is the fact that many of them relate to social matters. Although in his statement yesterday the Foreign Secretary said that he would maintain the Government's commitment to the opt-out from the social chapter, which would not end during their no doubt short-lived existence, it is clear from what has been said, both by the hon. Member for Ludlow and by others in interjections, that the so-called Euro-rebels do not believe

[Ms Quin]

in the value of the opt-out. They clearly think that there are other ways, via other parts of the treaties, in which various social measures can be applied across the European Union.

Mr. Marlow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Quin: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman again. I have already given way to him once, and I have little time left.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Quin: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes), but this will be the last time.

Mr. Sykes: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way and indulging me. Is she aware that, in my constituency, there is a large company that could not afford to build a factory in France because of the social chapter and the minimum wage and that, as a result, it doubled its production in Scarborough? How would she answer that?

Ms Quin: By referring the hon. Gentleman to the speech recently made by President Chirac, in which he said that, these days, France is taking the lion's share of United States investment in the European Union. France is now second to the United Kingdom in terms of inward investment. That change has happened in recent years and it shows that, whatever the reasons are for inward investment going to particular countries, they have nothing to do with the social chapter.

That fact was confirmed to me by some of the Japanese firms that have invested in the United Kingdom. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to read the evidence given to the Employment Committee by the personnel director of Nissan, who said that the social chapter had no influence in its decision to invest in the United Kingdom.

Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary made a rather strange claim about subsidiarity, which I would like the Minister to address in his reply. We all agree that subsidiarity is a good principle, but yesterday the Foreign Secretary claimed that the United Kingdom had introduced that vital concept into the Maastricht treaty. My understanding is that that is not the case.

Subsidiarity already existed, under article 130S of the Single European Act. Treaty buffs will know that that is in the section of the Act that relates to the environment, which talks about working out which decisions should be taken at EU level and which should be taken at other levels. The concept of subsidiarity is not unique to the British Government and their approach to the European Union. Perhaps the Minister will say something about that.

The hon. Member for Ludlow and his Euro-rebel friends said that they wanted the power of the European Union to be cut. I have a feeling that the White Paper does not offer them anything like enough in terms of cuts in EU power. Perhaps the Minister could also address that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock rightly stressed the importance of the enlargement issue—something about which I feel strongly and passionately. Having encouraged the changes in central and eastern Europe, we have a moral, political and economic responsibility to make our relationships with the countries there a success, and to bring them into as close an arrangement for membership of the European Union as we can, as quickly as we can. Continued enlargement should not be regarded only as a problem, which it is often presented as being, but as an exciting opportunity.

There is not much vision in the White Paper. The Government mention enlargement, but not its exciting possibilities. They mention common agricultural policy reform, but express no specific ideas about the reforms they want. If they had suggested that we should reform the common agricultural policy to improve its impact on the environment and to try to make it more helpful to developing countries outside the European Union, that would have been welcome. The Government have blocked a welcome move to tackle the problem of racism and xenophobia at European level. We feel strongly about that omission.

The White Paper is a desperate attempt to please two different audiences. It is a thin document. Is will not win the Government friends in their party, in the country, or among our European partners.

I should like, finally, to refer the Minister to an article in the press this week by the former Foreign Secretary, Lord Howe. He said that the Government's approach to the European Union

"has engendered the view in European capitals that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to do serious business with the UK this side of the general election."

10.50 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on obtaining this debate, and at such an appropriate time. It will fall neatly between yesterday's statement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary on the White Paper on the intergovernmental conference and the full debate on 21 March 1996.

Mr. Mackinlay: Only one day?

Mr. Davis: Yes. I do not have to debate the business of the House with the hon. Gentleman. I shall come to one or two of his points later.

I shall try to concentrate on points that were not covered yesterday and those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow, and if we do not cover them all today perhaps we shall pick some up later.

I wish to dismiss almost out of hand the comments of the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin). They were a mixture of three not very desirable things. The first was ignorance. The White Paper was written in response to a request from three Select Committees, and the hon. Lady should have known that, especially as I told her in European Standing Committee B only the day before it was announced. Secondly, Labour policy is partly a lame shadowing of our policy when the Labour party is too afraid to have a view of its own. Thirdly, it is a pathetic wriggling on hooks—

Ms Quin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Davis: No, I shall not. The hon. Lady has already taken enough time.

It is a pathetic wriggling on hooks that the Labour leader has impaled the hon. Lady on in moments of Europhoria.

On the social chapter, the hon. Lady took an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes). She admitted that France was second, not first—we are first—in terms of inward investment. She should read some of the French press of recent weeks, such as *Le Monde* recognising for the first time that perhaps France should learn from the British model in generating employment. Perhaps she should have seen "The Money Programme" earlier this week, in which several German business leaders spoke about the need for Germany to adopt the British model of deregulation and employment creation.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) *rose—*

Mr. Randall *rose—*

Mr. Davis: I shall not give way.

Modern Europe is based on the concept of nation states. The nation state attracts the allegiance, affection and pride of its people. People's sense of identity derives principally from their sense of nationhood. Any democratically elected Government must base their policies on that clear political imperative and act first and foremost in the people's interest.

Our membership of the Union has delivered important benefits. From within the Union we have been able to lead the drive for a European market that is open internally and which we intend to open to the rest of the world. European Union membership has been crucial to attracting inward investment to this country. The European Union is a major force for peace and stability in Europe.

Mr. Mackinlay: That is right.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) made some good points about that. It is in the context of the Union that we shall be able to heal the divisions of the cold war on our continent. The enlargement of the EU is an historic responsibility for Europe and a long-term British interest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow is right that the Union will remain a force for prosperity and security only if it is a Union that people feel comfortable with. That means remaining truly a partnership of nations based on consent, freely given, of its members.

Mr. Randall: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Davis: No, I shall not. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have very little time to answer most of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow.

No change should be brought about by dogmatic beliefs or zealous pursuit of some remote, unjustified or unaccountable centralism. If the need for change is not clearly demonstrated, change should be avoided. That is the basis on which we approach the IGC. The European Union should concentrate single-mindedly on what needs to be done at a European level and doing it well, and not interfering where it is not needed.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my hon. Friend give way on an important point?

Mr. Davis: If my hon. Friend is very fast.

Mr. Wilkinson: The Foreign Secretary rightly referred to President Santer's observation that the European Union should do "less but better". Cannot the British Government hasten that process by seeking to recuperate powers to this country at present undertaken by the European Union so that it can indeed do less?

Mr. Davis: I recommend that my hon. Friend reads the items on page 12 of the White Paper on limitation of powers and some passages about common fisheries. I shall discuss some of those points specifically later.

Mr. Randall: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Davis: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have five minutes to make several points.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister just gave way to someone who just walked into the debate.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) was here at the beginning of the debate.

Mr. Sheerman: Oh no he was not.

Mr. Davis: Oh yes he was. I shall continue my point, if I may, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Of course, many member states are still attracted to elements of a federal vision for Europe. We have heard that the Liberal party is also attracted to it. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow outlined the views of the Commission in that respect, and they are not a bad proxy for several of those member states, as is demonstrated by the Benelux position taken last week, so we obviously have something quite difficult to deal with.

We still encounter the school of thought that says that the answer to popular disenchantment with Europe is more Europe. That is reminiscent of the Socialist party in the 1980s, when it was beaten in the elections, saying that the answer was more socialism. That view was as wrong then as this view is for Europe now.

Our approach to the IGC, set out in the White paper, will have to contend with the committed federalist positions of many of our partners, so there is a hard pounding ahead in the negotiations, but I am not as pessimistic as my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow about our chances of success. We have force of will on our side. We have a constructive and coherent approach, backed up by solid and convincing arguments. In many ways, the flow of events is on our side; that point should not be ignored.

Another factor is on our side. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) said in his excellent speech, all over Europe, people are expressing unease about the direction in which the European Union

[Mr. Davis]

is going. Support for the Union is falling. It is our duty to stand up for those people, articulate their anxieties and develop constructive solutions to promote their and our interests.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood said that Mr. Santer had espoused a view of "less but better". That is an accurate description of what we want to do first.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow mentioned monetary union. That issue will not, or is unlikely to, come up at the intergovernmental conference. That does not mean that we shall be inactive on it. My hon. Friend witnessed the actions of the Prime Minister with respect to the ins and outs and the real problems that monetary union already poses to the single market.

I do not intend to intervene in my hon. Friend's correspondence with the Economic Secretary—I am sure that she can put the Government's case pretty well—but I say more generally that many of our fellow Europeans regard monetary union as a stepping stone to political union, and for that reason alone we must be hawk-eyed about it. A wide variety of people—such as Otmar Issing, who was mentioned by my hon. Friend, Ralf Dahrendorf and Bernard Connolly, for that matter—have expressed the view that EMU could break up Europe. Those people represent a wide spectrum of opinion, and there are many points of view in between, but that spectrum reinforces the wisdom of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's position in maintaining the opt-out for Britain while maintaining influence over the outcome of events. The range of possibilities is exactly why that is the right position to take.

I have only a minute to answer my hon. Friend's other points. At the beginning of this week, I had the pleasure of seeing him on television, asking, "Where's the beef?" in the White Paper. It was appropriate that he should ask that question. Afterwards, I went through his document—his green paper, as he called it. We drew up the policies in the White Paper in the course of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

Fire Services

11 am

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I make no apology for this being the fourth occasion in as many weeks on which I have raised my concerns about the fire service. On previous occasions, those concerns were related to the situation in London. Today I wish to widen the debate in view of the fears expressed by other hon. Members about the situation in their constituencies.

We now seem to be embroiled in an annual ritual fight over budgets for fire brigades: a fight to save fire stations, to save fire engines on the road, to save firefighters' jobs and, ultimately, to save lives. Implementation of the proposed fire service cuts will cost lives that the firefighters are there to protect and also the lives of firefighters themselves.

Earlier this year, hon. Members received a letter from Dennis Davies, president of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association, in which he stated:

"The fire service is facing a serious financial situation which needs to be remedied if it is not to create major operational difficulties."

Mr. Davies, who is chief fire officer for Cheshire, said that current expenditure in real terms on the fire service exceeds formal allocations, as expressed in the revenue support grant, by about £80 million. He said in his letter:

"To date the service, locally managed through Fire Authorities although substantially centrally funded, has sought to keep its quality by internal changes and innovation."

He added, however, that a crisis had been averted in many cases because

"local government has consistently placed Fire higher in the list of local service priorities, often to the detriment of other services."

The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), agreed with that point when he said in a reply to the hon. Member for South Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) that

"a shire county is not limited in its spending on its fire brigade by the fire service share of its SSA. What matters is the overall SSA for the county council. It is for the county council to decide its priorities for spending across all its services."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1175.]

So there we have it from the mouth of the Minister. Fire cover can be maintained in the shire counties, despite underfunding, by cuts in education or social services. The hon. Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and for South Worcestershire were rightly concerned about the possible risks to their areas from the proposed closures of Beudley and Pebworth, the halving of staffing at Kidderminster, the reduction in the number of appliances and the removal of a hydraulic platform.

Principal fire officers have instituted countless reviews and embraced many new ideas. The Audit Commission has also conducted an in-depth review. It is now estimated that that review will result in only £7 million savings from improved performance, whereas the initial optimistic forecast was for £67 million. Either figure would leave the service with a substantial shortfall.

I share Mr. Davies's concern that, despite routine local reporting of fire service difficulties and the generally held belief that our communities should be safe, the fire service predicament has not yet reached the national consciousness and we have not yet had a national debate. I hope that today's debate will lead to a full national debate.

Fire services have a responsibility to comply with operational standards set by the Home Office. Increasingly, however, performance to minimum standards—measured, in the case of the fire service, by speed of attendance at the scene of a fire—has become the acceptable quality standard. Attendance times are important—they can mean the difference between life and death—but as the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association said,

"achieving a fast arrival is just the beginning of our task."

What real value is there in the fast arrival of an ill-equipped or ill-trained fire crew?

The current situation—and this trend is accelerating—is that the absolute need to ensure a fast response is taking money from training, vehicle replacements, equipment purchases and public education and prevention programmes. The association has warned that the fire service—which needs technical development to meet more complex hazards, with better information systems and personal protection—is short of basic capital investment, that new skills training is stagnating when it should be growing and that research into better options for public protection is slowing down.

Last month, firefighters from Tyne and Wear came to Parliament to spell out the consequences of the £2.3 million shortfall in their 1996-97 budget to hon. Members.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning Tyne and Wear. As I believe he knows, we are faced with losing, through natural wastage, 92 front-line firefighters. That is bound to have an impact on a service which has always received the auditors' approval for its cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Austin-Walker: I certainly take that point. The loss of 92 firefighters' jobs and the loss of five firefighting appliances in my hon. Friend's area will obviously affect public safety.

Mr. Mullin: It is seven appliances.

Mr. Austin-Walker: I stand corrected. Those losses are happening in an area in which three members of the public died in a fire after a fire station less than one minute from their home had been closed.

The problem does not exist only in urban and inner-city areas. In Scotland, many rural areas may be left to burn when stations in Balmoral, Gordonstoun, Rothes, Cullen, Banff and Kintore are closed. When a firefighter lost his foot, the fire authority concerned was criticised by the court for inadequate training; yet the current funding levels will mean further cuts in training for firefighters.

The Government's approach to the fire service has been typical of their approach to all public services: they want to know the cost of everything but recognise the value of nothing. The Fire Service college is a case in point. That former centre of excellence and one time world leader has been reduced to agency status, and profit rather than professionalism has become the priority. Throughout Britain, firefighter training has been restricted as a result of understaffing and underfunding, and many brigades can no longer afford to send staff to the Fire Service college.

The key issue is insufficient total funding of the fire service, and the situation is bound to worsen due to the effects of the pensions time bomb. Eighteen months ago, in the debate on the Queen's Speech, I drew the Minister's attention to the problem facing the London fire authority and warned that unless that problem was dealt with, there was a

"real prospect that we face dramatic cuts in the cover provided by fire and civil defence authorities in the next financial year."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 293.]

In the debate on 9 February this year, I pointed out that in London the fire authority is already devoting 19 per cent. of its budget to pensions. I further stated:

"The estimate of the pension requirements in 1996-97 is £45 million. The calculation in the SSA is £41 million—a difference of £4 million".—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 630.]

Nationally, it is estimated that in 10 years' time employers' contributions to the pension fund will absorb 25 per cent. of total fire service revenue expenditure. In London, the 25 per cent. level will be reached by the year 2002 or 2003. Throughout the country, the result of the Government's financial settlement will be a loss of hundreds of operational posts and a virtual freeze on recruitment. That will inevitably exacerbate the pension problems as fewer firefighters will be contributing to the pensions of more retired firefighters.

The Minister tells us that authorities have reserves or that further savings can be made, but it has already been shown that the efficiency savings identified by the Audit Commission are more likely to yield only £7 million rather than the £67 million hoped for by the Government. Services have already been pared to the bone. The Government claim that that is political posturing by Ken Cameron and the Fire Brigades Union, or by Councillor Tony Ritchie of the London fire authority, but the truth is that anyone who knows anything about the fire services holds the same view.

Mr. Clarkson, the previous chief fire officer for London, is on record as having said that he had already cut the service to the bone and that there was no more room for cuts. He is not a member of the Fire Brigades Union, and he is certainly not a member of the Labour party. It was revealed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) in a debate on 1 February that Mr. Clarkson is in fact a Conservative nominee for the police committee in Kent.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): Does my hon. Friend agree that the loss of 15 fire appliances from the capital is particularly absurd at a time of threats of disruption from bombs and that it is particularly inappropriate that as we develop the site for the millennium festival in Greenwich the two stations next to that site are to lose fire appliances? Does he further agree that Londoners would prefer to pay 4p per week and feel secure in the knowledge that they have a good fire service rather than face the cuts imposed by the Government?

Mr. Austin-Walker: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am intimately concerned about Greenwich, which is in a neighbouring constituency. It is true that East Greenwich fire station, which is east of the millennium site, is to lose an appliance, as is Deptford fire station, to the west of the site, which is eventually scheduled for closure. That problem in London must be addressed.

The major difficulties faced by the fire authorities stem from the local government settlement for the current year and the next. Last year's settlement, which was generally

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accepted to be one of the most difficult on record, meant a planned overall increase of 3.3 per cent. in public expenditure, whereas most local authorities were required to manage budget increases limited to 0.5 per cent. No increase in provision was made for the fire service and the spending caps remained screwed down. The 1996-97 settlement shows little change, with an increase of just 1.5 per cent.

I accept that the SSA formula now includes a pensions element, but that is not the same as injecting additional money to cover costs. Nationally, the settlement for 1996-97 represents a cut in real terms of £70 million. That is the shortfall between actual budgets and the settlement. In London, that means a gap of £7 million. The 1995-96 budget of £258 million would need to be increased to £266 million to maintain current levels of service—a service already "cut to the bone", in the words of a former chief officer.

Some rather over-enthusiastic prospective Conservative parliamentary candidates in London, worried by the growing tide of public anger at threats to their fire stations, swallowed whole the propaganda from Tory central office. Those candidates were ready to rush into print in their local newspapers to say that it was all the fault of a wicked plan by a Labour-controlled authority which could not manage its finances. If only, instead of relying on the provenly unreliable central office machine, they had consulted their own Tory colleagues on the London fire authority. They should have read the letter, jointly signed by the leader of that authority, the leader of the Conservative group, Councillor Adrian Fitzgerald and the leader of the Liberals, Councillor Rowlands. If those candidates had consulted Tory councillors on that authority, they would have realised that the statements made by Baroness Blatch in her letter to hon. Members were at best misleading and that the document from Tory central office was a total distortion of the facts.

I regret that the SSA formula does not measure real fire cover needs. It is important to consider risk categorisation. Attendance times—and hence resources—are based on that categorisation. I welcome the comments of the Audit Commission in its report of last year, "In the Line of Fire". The categorisation of risk dates back to the days when insurance companies ran the fire service and graded their risks on the basis of property liability and not the saving of lives.

Many modern buildings incorporate sophisticated fire prevention and detection features, something which is absent from most inner-city and urban homes. It is in densely populated urban areas, however, that most deaths occur. Under the Government's categorisation of risk, most urban areas of terraced, detached and semi-detached housing and blocks of flats are categorised as C risk. That means that one fire engine should be sent to arrive at a fire within eight to 10 minutes. I believe that the current level of service in London is appropriate. The fire authority treats a domestic fire in a C risk area as one in a B risk area, where policy dictates that two appliances should be sent—one to arrive within five minutes and the second within eight minutes. There have been countless instances in London in which the lives of members of the public and of firefighters would have been lost if just one appliance had been sent to a house fire and arrived within 10 minutes. In some of the outer areas of London, including parts of my constituency, properties are categorised as D risk—which means that one fire appliance is sent, to arrive within 20 minutes. Thankfully, it is the policy of the London fire authority, supported by Conservative councillors on that authority, to send two appliances to any house fire.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his comprehensive account. Can he tell me whether an arrival time of 20 minutes is sanctioned by the Home Office?

Mr. Austin-Walker: I regret to say that it is.

The Minister of State replied to my Adjournment debate on the fire service on 9 February and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), replied to a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East on 1 February. Both Ministers said that the London fire authority could make cuts and still meet the Home Office's recommended attendance times, and they were probably telling the truth. The Under-Secretary of State quoted the authority's report, which said that the reductions could be made

"without affecting the Authority's ability to meet Home Office recommended times."

What Ministers did not admit, however, is that that guarantee represents a dramatic reduction in service. Following the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), I ask the Minister whether he thinks it reasonable that a fire in a flat on the Glyndon estate in Plumstead should be responded to by one fire engine, arriving in 10 minutes, without any further back-up. If he does, I must tell him that lives will be lost. The later an appliance reaches the scene of a fire, the greater the risk to the building and to any occupants, and the later a firefighter arrives, the greater the risk to him or her from flames, suffocation or falling debris—as in the case of Fleur Lombard.

Cheshire's chief fire officer makes the point that fast arrival is just the beginning; what then comes into play is the equipment, the back-up and the fact that the crews are well trained. A fire dealt with at its inception is much easier to extinguish than one that has taken hold. That makes sense financially, too, as resources are tied up for less time, allowing other incidents to be dealt with. If the fire gets worse before an engine arrives, the crew will be there much longer and will be unable to respond to other calls. If a crew turns up and there are people to be rescued, it can usually rely on the second crew to do resuscitation and first aid. The first few minutes are vital.

The health and safety of crews is also at risk when just one appliance is used and approved procedures have to be ignored. Imagine a fire on the 20th floor of one of the blocks on the Glyndon estate. The five firefighters have to take into the building two lengths of hose, two sets of breathing apparatus, one branch, one adaptor, one breathing apparatus control board, one dividing breach, one radio, breaking-in gear, a first aid kit, one or two axes and a resuscitator. The officer in charge must stay downstairs to implement command and control; the driver operates the pump to ensure that the water gets upstairs and another firefighter will set in the hydrant and dry riser to allow the passage of water. That leaves two firefighters to carry all that equipment. There is no breathing control officer and no one to carry out first aid.

Such is the result of a one-appliance response, with which the Minister seems quite content. Does he believe that a one-appliance response within 10 minutes is adequate in such a situation? That is, after all, the Home Office minimum standard. Minimum standards should be a safeguard for the public. Instead, those standards are being used as a lever to cut spending. As the screw tightens, either the service copes, but at a cost in terms of quality, reliability and morale—the lowering of any one of which puts lives at risk—or a major disaster occurs. It has not yet happened on a large scale, but any fire officer can cite one example after another of instances in which the outcome could have been disastrous. Every turn of the screw brings us closer to that disaster.

In the debate on 9 February, I compared two incidents in Woolwich. One took place when Shooters hill fire station had two appliances, and the other when it had one. In the first, four people in Rowton road were saved. In the second, in Llanover road, four people died; I do not claim that they would have survived if two appliances had been available, but it remains in the minds of everyone involved in that incident that a second appliance might have made all the difference.

As I have said, some parts of Woolwich are categorised as D risk. The Minister believes that it is reasonable for a fire in property there to be dealt with by one engine, arriving within 20 minutes. Thank goodness a Labour councillor and not the Minister is in charge of the London fire authority.

I speak with experience of London, but there is a nationwide crisis. In Greater Manchester, budget reductions have averaged £1 million a year over the past two years. Vacant fire safety officer posts have remained unfilled and repair and maintenance work has been reduced. Tyne and Wear has had to take off two front-line fire appliances and suspend its safety education programme. West Midlands has had a £4.6 million budget cut, with major cuts in training and no capital available for replacement fire stations. South Yorkshire has a shortfall of more than £1 million and the district auditor has warned that reserves are at the minimum acceptable level, so there is no possibility of their being available to help support the budget in future years.

The crisis is not only in London and the metropolitan areas; it is nationwide. I could give endless examples of cuts in services being made by brigades in county areas. In the home counties, there will be no minor works, no provision for information technology or for fire safety work as set out in the Audit Commission report, and 50 per cent. cuts in training at the Fire Service college. In the north-west, there are no resources for hazard management to deal with chemical spills and fires, and fire safety officer inspections have been reduced.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): In my constituency in the north-west, there is a category A fire risk in close proximity to Victorian housing. Does my hon. Friend agree, given such situations, that the cuts—which are spread across the country as he has described—typify the way in which the Government are mismanaging the situation? If we do not do something about that as a matter of urgency, the "What happens if . . ." question that arose from the Associated Octel fire last year will hit us very seriously.

Mr. Austin-Walker: I share my hon. Friend's concerns. I know that the Cheshire area has several establishments which use hazardous industrial processes and chemicals. I agree about the potential danger, which I shall come to because there are some risks with which fire authorities have to deal for which there is no adequate recompense or any funding arrangement. They include dealing with spillages of hazardous chemicals. Fire brigades are effectively funded only to deal with fire operations.

In the south-west, there have been reductions in essential training and community fire safety units have been abolished. I mentioned earlier the cuts in Scotland. The list goes on and on, and it makes depressing reading.

Capital funds are an essential part of fire service development. I live in Thamesmead, a new town built on the Thames marshes. No additional fire cover has been provided for it, although a dedicated fire station was once promised. When I complained, Baroness Blatch replied that it was nothing to do with her but a matter for the authority—yet she controls the authority's capital expenditure.

For the London fire authority, the basic credit approval for 1996-97 has been set at £5.5 million—£3 million less than for the current year—nearly halving the authority's capital programme so that it is unable to sustain the level of investment needed in vehicles and equipment without reductions in appliances or crews. On Merseyside, the credit approval is £2.1 million against a requirement of £3.5 million. The money available for vehicles is less than a third of what is required.

If we take the figures for all fire and civil defence authorities, basic credit approvals have been cut from £23 million in the current year to £15 million in the coming year—a decrease of almost 35 per cent. for Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, West Yorkshire and London.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): What my hon. Friend describes is common in north Wales. We have had a major cut in the capital programme. On top of all that, local government reorganisation has reduced the number of fire services from eight to three and created additional difficulties that have not been recognised by the Government.

Mr. Austin-Walker: My hon. Friend points to the fact that several factors are not fully taken into account in calculating a fire authority's spending needs. They are certainly not adequately taken into account in the standard spending assessment.

I shall briefly describe the background to the cuts. In the 10 years from 1983 to 1993-94, the operational establishment in fire services in Great Britain went down from 40,000 to 39,438, while fire calls rose by 28 per cent. and false alarms rose by 116 per cent. Calls for special services went up by a staggering 82 per cent. Special services include attending road traffic accidents and releasing trapped people; releasing people trapped in lifts; dealing with spillages of hazardous chemicals; pumping flood water out of premises and similar services. However—wait for it—the Government do not take account of any of those services in deciding funding for fire authorities. In London, the number of such incidents, at more than 61,000 a year, exceeds the number of fire calls, excluding false alarms. No wonder Mr. Davies of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association said:

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"Fire service funding would be a farce if it wasn't so serious. The Standard Spending Assessment is worse than the National Lottery—at least there, somebody wins."

Most people would be surprised—I suspect that some hon. Members are surprised—to learn that the fire service receives no funding for turning out to road traffic accidents or rail crashes. There is no funding and no obligation to assist. Nevertheless, the fire brigades turn out, as we expect them to. That part of their work has grown by 82 per cent. since 1983. Is it not time that the Minister recognised that in the funding formula?

I hear that some brigades may be planning to charge victims of road accidents for cutting them out of vehicles. Will they ask to see our credit cards before rescuing us—"Yes, that'll do nicely sir"? I also hear that some brigades are contemplating setting up driving schools as a nice little earner to boost their inadequate budgets.

Recently, we mourned the deaths of three firefighters. On 6 February, the Prime Minister referred to

"the selfless bravery of the fire service."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 133.]

Why, then, do the Government refuse to fund this selfless service? It is intolerable that it should take the tragic deaths of courageous public servants to draw attention to the dire state to which the fire service is being reduced. As the Fire Brigades Union has said:

"how many firefighters and members of the public must continue to die as a result of fires and fire related incidents before the parliamentarians that represent the people of the UK will in fact listen to us. If such views are unpalatable to some, then that is a reality that they must come to terms with, the FBU only relates the experiences and concerns of firefighters.

Must we really, as a nation that has led the world in so many areas of excellence and endeavour, enter the next millennium and the 21st century on the basis that only disaster and significant casualty and fatality figures or losses arising from such occurrences are necessary to even spur the policy makers into considering what might be done to protect us all collectively from such circumstances?"

The answer must be no. The Government must think again and we must have this national debate now.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): It is obvious that a large number of hon. Members wish to speak. I make a plea for short speeches.

11.27 am

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) on winning this important debate, which I am pleased to be able to participate in, especially as a London Member. He is a London Member who has spoken before on the subject regarding London, but this morning he has given the House the opportunity to debate the fire services in the rest of the country. I shall concentrate on London.

Congratulating the hon. Gentleman on getting the debate and choosing this subject is about the last compliment that I shall have for him. The hon. Gentleman has given us a tour d'horizon of the fire services and the arguments that many of us have heard before from representatives of the Fire Brigades Union in our constituencies. I wonder, with all his hopes and wishes, whether his speech has been looked over by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). There were considerable cost implications in what he said. I imagine that the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), will have something to say about that and that our colleagues in the Treasury will examine closely what Labour Members have said about the fire services. Costs are vital in every area of government and of public service, and the fire service must be subject to rules of efficiency. The hon. Member for Woolwich said that the Audit Commission's assessment of savings of £67 million in the fire service across the country is on the high side—a fact that he claims the Audit Commission now acknowledges. I have not seen any documentation to that effect, but, if about £67 million in efficiency savings can be achieved across the nation, presumably we are talking about possible efficiency savings of £12 million to £15 million in the London fire service. The Audit Commission suggested efficiency savings in a number of areas.

I turn now to the specific arguments regarding the London fire service. I praise the bravery of the fire service and the enormous skills of the front-line firefighters in our capital city. I am sure that everyone agrees that London has a fine fire service, which is well above the minimum standards laid down by the Home Office in terms of fire appliances and fire stations.

Therefore, I was amazed when I heard that the London fire authority was considering closing four fire stations and reducing the number of fire appliances in London. According to figures provided by the fire authority, it has substantial reserves totalling £27 million. Its standard spending assessment has increased this year and the level of the cap has also increased by £5 million.

Ms Hodge: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has managed to praise the London fire service. Does he agree that, if the fire service in London is funded by eating into reserves, those reserves will vanish by 1998-99? Does he agree also—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Only one point should be raised by way of intervention.

Ms Hodge: The two matters are linked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should recognise that it is a tradition of the House that interventions deal with a single subject.

Mr. Tracey: As she also represents a London constituency, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) may wish to catch your eye to speak in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are talking about £27 million in reserves for the London fire authority. I understand that the Birmingham fire authority has only £2 million in reserve, so reserves of £27 million are far and away above the level required. The hon. Lady has led a local authority—we all have views about it—and she must recognise that £27 million is an enormous sum. At the beginning of the year, the director of finance for the London fire authority said that the reserves were too high and should be reduced. He revealed also that the fire authority underspent by £3.7 million last year. What possible reason could it have for threatening to close four fire stations and reduce the number of fire appliances—two of them in Twickenham and in Wimbledon close to my constituency? Naturally, I deplore such plans.

A remarkable thing then occurred. Hon. Members and the London local authorities complained about the plans previewed by the London fire authority. Quite mysteriously, about a week before it was to meet to decide on the budget cuts, we heard that a Labour party caucus meeting somewhere in London had decided that the four fire stations would not close and that several fire appliances would not be removed. Councillor Ritchie, the Labour leader of the predominantly Labour-controlled London fire authority, then announced to the nation what had been decided in the Labour party caucus meeting. That is a disgraceful way to run the fire service in the capital.

We have heard much about the level of protection needed for the millennium celebrations in Greenwich and the protection necessary for the great stores, Government buildings and our built heritage in central London. Fire safety has been undermined by the disgraceful actions of the fire authority which, after scaremongering and politicking, reached a decision in a Labour party caucus meeting and announced its decision via a press release.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Is my hon. Friend aware that 22 Labour councillors, six Conservatives and one independent serve on the London fire and civil defence authority? In addition to the funding that the authority has put aside and its underspend, the Audit Commission conducted an inquiry and found that the authority's training methods and its expenditure were above the level requested by the commission. As a consequence, is my hon. Friend aware—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have made it clear that interventions should comprise a short question and not a speech.

Mr. Tracey: I am well aware of the situation that my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) describes. He has been at the forefront of the campaign against the disgraceful cuts which would have reduced the number of appliances in his area.

I shall draw my remarks to a close as I have highlighted my anger upon hearing about the nonsensical actions of the predominantly Labour-controlled fire authority. Its behaviour has mirrored that of Labour local authorities around the country. There is no basis for the authority's assertions. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) has tried for three weeks to get details from the fire authority about why it suddenly reversed its decision to close four fire stations and reduce the number of fire appliances. Perhaps he will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and explain the situation.

I believe that the London fire authority has engaged in a particularly squalid exercise. The final straw was Councillor Ritchie's announcement that the London fire authority intends to increase overseas travel allowances—heaven knows why—by £5,800 and to increase members' expenses by £43,200. That shows what the London fire authority is made of.

11.38 am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Shortly after I became a Member of Parliament, I was holidaying in the former Yugoslavia when a charter plane crashed. Many British people died in the accident and those who survived suffered appalling burns. I spent four days with my doctor husband in the hospitals that were treating the victims, and the sights, sounds and smells of what fire can do to human beings will remain with me for the rest of my life.

Therefore, when I learnt that the Cheshire chief fire officer was saying, in an extremely responsible way, that the fire service was now at a considerable risk of not being able to provide adequate and proper fire cover, I took it seriously. I took this issue seriously—not like some hon. Members who seem to think that it is a suitable subject for squalid party political arguments—because there are men and women in the fire service who daily risk their lives and considerable injury. They have a strong belief that our constituents are entitled to high-quality fire services and protection.

It is important to take seriously what the Cheshire chief fire officer is saying. He has looked at the cuts—not one set of cuts but a series of cuts across the budgets over a number of years—and has concluded on behalf of the Cheshire fire service, and many fire services across the country, that one can no longer seriously talk about providing the level of cover that is essential. He has not said that the fire services cannot respond to an external audit that says that there should be some efficiency savings and a rearrangement in the way in which they work.

The chief fire officer has said something more fundamental: that we have now undergone a series of changes, we are still undergoing a series of changes and we are no longer able to provide the level of care that the general public are entitled to assume we will provide. That is the issue—it is an argument about not the political views of individual fire committees, but whether the House of Commons will face up to the fact that we are not allowing sufficient money for the fire service to do the job for which it is retained. That seems to me to be so essential and simple, and I cannot see why it is difficult for hon. Members to understand it.

The Cheshire chief fire officer said—I am talking about Cheshire, but what I am saying applies to many brigades:

"Our study indicates that the Brigade is very efficient. The Brigade has been required to make significant savings in each of the last three years, in 1994/95 these amounted to £195,000".

He continued:

"One of the best indicators of the overall cost effectiveness of a brigade is its gross cost per pump. Other statistics may provide an indication of the efficiency . . . but the gross cost per pump, when compared to benchmark figures, gives an indication of the likely savings".

He then details the figures, which prove time and time again that the fire service is doing a good job. The Cheshire chief fire officer has also given me the effects of the underfunding over these years, including capital costs. It has meant a cut in operational officer cover, a reduction in managerial posts, changes to staffing practices at shift changeover and bank holidays, a reduction in rescue tender provision, a rationalisation of special appliance provision—I could go on. In capital costs, it means that equipment is not being replaced, that modern equipment that is available to save lives is not being supplied and that there are real problems in finding the money for core training for officers.

I shall briefly say what I think of a Government who allow an important service like the Fire Service college to be treated in that shabby way. The Government have seen

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fit to write off the debts of innumerable companies when they want to sell them on the private market. The Government have no difficulty whatsoever in writing off billions of pounds of taxpayers' money, but when the fire college was set up as an independent agency, it was lumbered with considerable debts and was told to recover them from the fees that it charges.

The result is terribly simple and plain: throughout the United Kingdom, fire services are not sending the same number of fire officers for core training, which their chief fire officers believe to be essential, because of the cost. Such training is down by 25 per cent. Fire officers in need of proper training are not receiving it, not because no one accepts the need for it but because they cannot pay for it. That is a simple formula. What will it lead to? It will lead to death, to injury and to lifetimes of unhappiness for our constituents who are caught in major fires. It is unacceptable for a so-called civilised country to have got its priorities so badly wrong.

I have listened with care to the various debates as to whether the money is available. Is it not astonishing that when the Government want to spend a great deal of money on arms, they can find however much money they want? However, when we want to find money to provide a high-quality fire service—to protect our constituents, to carry out the training programmes that fire services are increasingly doing and to teach small children what to do if a fire breaks out—it is not available. That is despicable and unacceptable.

If this debate awakens in the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), even a tiny voice of conscience, it will have achieved more than what my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker), who introduced the debate, set out to achieve.

11.47 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) on securing the debate and I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). She has given me an ideal introduction to the debate, because I want to say a few brief words about the Fire Service college at Moreton-in-Marsh, which is in the heart of my constituency. The college employs 250 of my constituents in a rural area. It is a national asset.

I shall briefly describe the college to hon. Members. It comprises 500 acres of an old airfield. It has magnificent facilities: a mock motorway, so that it can stage mock pile-ups; an office block, so that it can stage fires in a three-storey office block; and an entire mock ship, so that it can stage fires on it. The college teaches British firemen with the best facilities and training in the world. The college has excellent information technology laboratories and it has the national fire service chapel. It is an absolute gem—it is a national asset. We should be able to train British firemen to the highest standards at the college, and market its services to the rest of the world because there is nothing else like it, except in the United States.

I have had discussions with Baroness Blatch about the future of the college. It was set up as an independent trading fund in 1992 and it has consistently been making a loss. In case any hon. Member jumps to the conclusion that it is being run inefficiently, I emphasise that that could not be further from the truth. The college was set up as an independent trading fund on 1 April 1992, and it was the first such independent trading fund to be set up by the Government. Unfortunately, the Treasury had eyes on a milch cow that was non-existent and it set it up with several severe disadvantages, which I shall outline to hon. Members.

When the Treasury set up the Fire Service college, it made it honour its commitment to prices of courses before it was set up as a trading fund. That reduced the college's profit in its first year of trading by £1.2 million. Much more importantly, a valuation of the college was carried out by a well-known firm of chartered surveyors at £33 million. Being a chartered surveyor, I hesitate to criticise a fellow firm of surveyors. However, I am reliably informed that that was a gross overestimate of the valuation of the college at that time and that it should have been less than £10 million. The problem is that, because of that trading fund status, the college is obliged to pay notional interest on half the loan because half of it is deemed public interest capital, and the notional loan in the accounts this year amounts to £1.7 million.

The college is thirdly disadvantaged by a further £1.25 million as a result of a decision last year by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise that the college has to pay VAT but cannot reclaim it. The notional interest, and the fact that it cannot reclaim VAT, amounts to about £2.5 million. Last year, it made a loss of £2.75 million. The chief executive, Nigel Finlayson, and the commandant, Mr. David, do an excellent job, but it is tremendously dispiriting to be saddled with such on-costs about which nothing can be done.

I have had discussions with Baroness Blatch to see what can be done to secure the college's future. I have been trying to encourage other Government organisations to place their training at the college, most notably the Ministry of Defence. However, I have received a reply from the MOD saying that it is not prepared to commit its training requirements to the national Fire Service college while there is a question mark over its future.

The chief executive goes all over the world. I pay tremendous tribute to him because he increased the non-UK training budget last year by more than 10 per cent. He is doing a magnificent job, but he has one hand tied behind his back when the accounts for the past three years show that the college has been making a loss of more than £2 million.

I do not want to take up too much of the debate, but I suggest three courses of action to the noble Baroness in order to secure the college's future. First, as has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, the Government should, having set up the college as a trading fund on the wrong basis, now write off all past debts and notional interest rates, allowing it to start with a clean sheet so that we can see whether it is run efficiently.

If the Government are not prepared to do that, they should consider—I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take these concerns back to Baroness Blatch—allowing the college to revert to the former Home Office vote. The college should be run directly from the Home Office and everybody should accept that the college will make a loss of about £2.5 million a year.

If neither of those two alternatives is acceptable, the college should be sold off to an entrepreneur, with appropriate safeguards for training the UK fire service, with a remit to go out into the world and obtain as much non-UK fire service business as possible. It should then be required to make a profit. The Government would benefit from the sale of the college and the people running it would not have the burdens around their necks.

As has already been mentioned this morning, there is considerable concern about the adequacy of the training of UK firemen. At the moment, the college provides just over 16,000 man days of fire training. But there is great concern that, with the squeeze on the SSAs of each fire authority, that figure may drop to 14,000. If that happens, the college will make a substantially bigger loss next year, and that will not be caused by the college's inefficiency in organising itself.

It would be a tragedy if this national asset were to be let go. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to take those concerns back to Baroness Blatch. I have written her a detailed letter, to which I have yet to receive a reply. However, I reassure the Government that I shall continue to battle for the future of the college because it is a national asset.

11.53 am

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I do not agree with everything that the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said; none the less, his speech was like a breath of fresh air coming through the smoke compared with some earlier contributions. I feared that the debate would deteriorate into a Conservative and Labour battleground over the particular problems in London. I hope that that will not happen, because the problems affecting the fire service concern hon. Members on both sides of the House and are of great concern to our constituents.

We know from the remarks addressed to us all by Mr. Davies, the president of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association, of his concern that, across the country, the fire service is, in effect, facing death by a thousand cuts—the gradual erosion of standards which is taking place year by year, yet is going largely unnoticed in the communities in the areas served by local fire brigades.

As has been said before, in Greater Manchester cuts of £1 million a year have been the fate of the local fire service during the past couple of years. Towards the end of last summer, I had the opportunity to visit firefighters in Oldham and Littleborough, serving my constituency, and to learn at first hand just how our firefighters spend their time. They had just finished a period which had seen some of the most intensive use of fire tenders and fire crews for many years, with a spate of moorland and heath fires in other parts of the country which had stretched their resources to the limit and beyond. Retired firefighters had to be called in to eke out the resources at that time.

General concern was expressed at both those fire stations that the squeeze on finance was likely to reduce the number of tenders available in their stations if a major incident took place across a wide area. There was also concern that access to the most modern equipment being developed by the fire brigade would be denied to them and they would have to make do with equipment which, while good in its day, would not meet the most modern requirements, placing the lives of firefighters at risk.

It is obvious that the vast majority of a firefighter's time is not spent fighting fires. It is spent in training, in maintaining equipment and in dealing with false alarms. Some 40 per cent. of incidents are cited as false alarms and, in practice, I suspect that that number is growing rapidly. The introduction of smoke alarms has been a major asset in saving lives in the home, but they have led to many additional call-outs for fire crews.

The fact that firefighting crews are not fighting fires does not mean that their time is not being spent usefully or that it is being wasted. They have to be equipped to deal with emergencies as and when they occur. They do not occur neatly, as a Government accountant might require them so to do.

When the bell rings in a fire station, the officer taking the call cannot know whether it will be a false alarm or will lead to tenders being sent out to deal with a life-threatening major fire or a major incident on a motorway in which a driver has to be cut out of the wreckage of a crashed vehicle. He cannot know whether it will prove to be a major city centre incident, perhaps the result of a terrorist outrage, something to which we have been alerted recently, requiring fire crews from across the county to meet the needs that arise. The service must be equipped to deal with those worst case scenarios.

Sadly, I fear that that is not the approach being taken by the Government. They seem to require brigade officers to use their equipment and resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. That, of course, is right, but the mechanism that they are using is the crude one of spending cuts requiring officers to face up to a crisis and to adjust to it accordingly.

The basic assumption for planning purposes is not the need to meet the worst case scenarios, but the need to deal with the average demands being placed on the service. That approach, which might be admirable if applied to an efficient quality manufacturing industry, is not appropriate to a fire service which has to meet the needs of people in situations which cannot be predicted. When the call comes, our firefighters need to be equipped and ready. The Government must address their concerns and ensure that they have the resources to meet the requirements placed on them and to maintain the confidence that the public rightly feel in the fire service.

I apologise to the House for the fact that I will not be able to stay to hear the end of the debate. I shall finish my remarks and allow other hon. Members to speak, but I wish to remind the House of the remarks made by Mr. Davies in the letter that was circulated to all hon. Members. He said that "delay is not acceptable" because it is "dangerous to firefighters". The House should accept that the cuts in expenditure are threatening a quality public service of which we can be proud, and they must be halted.

11.59 am

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I wish to take only two minutes of the time of the House. Although the debate has given a general impression of the fire service, it has centred almost entirely on the London scene and I was quite surprised to learn that there was a deposit account for the London fire service of £27 million. That may have made the authority change its mind when it considered closing down four stations, but in Hampshire it is a totally different story.

[Mr. James Hill]

The fire service in Hampshire is very efficient and modern in its approach. All the observations that my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) made about the training college in his area are duplicated in Hampshire.

There can be no doubt that cost is the issue. People in all grades of society are worried about cost and maximum efficiency. The way to get the message over is to ask the fire service to do the tasks and, if it cannot, exceptions can be made. The plan of Baroness Blatch and her colleague is to meet groups of Members of Parliament. All the Hampshire Members of Parliament have been given the opportunity to meet Baroness Blatch, and instead of all the argy-bargy and semi-political chitchat that some hon. Members have raised in the debate, we can have a balanced debate about the pros and cons. I am sure that, after meeting the Ministers, the Hampshire Members will put forward a formula that could carry the day.

Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the debate has been extremely useful in highlighting another problem in modern society.

12.2 pm

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): I shall speak as rapidly as possible because I wish to deal exclusively with the Greater Manchester fire service, its resources and its role.

In 1986, the Audit Commission reported that the fire services generally were "notably well managed", great value for money and, in efficiency and effectiveness, were second to none in the United Kingdom and the world. That is a glowing tribute to our fire services. The problem is the inability of the fire services to fulfil the statutory functions that are placed on them, because of the cuts imposed on them and their ever-increasing work load. The work load is rising at the same time as a static amount of money is available to the fire services to cope with the explosion in the number of incidents.

The incidence of fires in Manchester has constantly increased at a rate that is not commensurate with the amount of money available to increase the facilities to cope. In 1985, 48,000 incidents were recorded in Manchester, and in the past decade there has been a 70 per cent. increase, to 81,000 in 1995. Operational resources remained virtually unchanged in the same period. In 1994, the fire service in Manchester had just 68 appliances available to deal with that work load, and every single fire tender available had to deal with between 3,500 and 4,000 incidents.

When the fire service is forced—I use the word "forced" advisedly—by economic and financial constraints to impose a series of measures that impede or weaken the efficiency of the force, it gives rise to concerns that we all share, nationally and regionally. In my area, there has been much alarm about that problem. Budget reductions over the past two years have been about £1 million. This year—as was announced only yesterday—the chief fire officer of the Greater Manchester brigade said that there would be a £1.9 million deficit. That sum can be taken out of available balances, but the Audit Commission made it clear that it believed that no further injection of funds from the balances could be reconciled. That means that no more reserves will be available until 1998.

We have seen reductions in recruitment. Recruitment courses have had to be revised because of the cuts. The reduction in the use of the Fire Service college has been mentioned today, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on the way in which he put the case for the college. I disagree with him on privatisation, but the college is first class and that is recognised by all the brigades throughout the United Kingdom.

We have seen a decrease in repairs and in the efficiency of vital fire appliances. Further funding deficiencies, for obvious reasons, will accelerate the problem and make it harder for the fire services to fulfil their role. The prime example is the use of the fire college and the impact on core and non-core training of brigades. Future training is necessary—indeed, imperative—to give a first-class service.

In spite of the reduction in funding, the fire services are now expected to finance more and more high-tech equipment, which is more sophisticated and more costly than previous equipment. The new equipment must be used to its maximum efficiency to get value for money for the fire services, which do such a necessary job.

There is also increasing pressure to devote more resources to fire safety education. We need to do more work in fire prevention and to educate the general public. I tabled an early-day motion recently, which was signed by some 60 Members of Parliament, about the tragic death of a 15-year-old girl, Melanie Ellison, who suffered horrendous burns when the modern padded shirt that she was wearing—like the shirts and anoraks worn by many young people and, indeed, adults—ignited through a single spark from a cooker.

Some hon. Members will remember the campaign on foam in furniture. Such shirts should be labelled to show whether they are non-flammable or inflammable, according to the type of material used to fill them. Such tragedies could be avoided if warning labels were used. I have pointed that out to the Home Office, to the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs and to the industry. They have a clear responsibility to ensure that imported goods, many from third-world countries, should be subject to safety standards when imports are licensed. Labelling for such garments is imperative.

Last year, we had an unusual summer followed by a harsh winter, and the demands on fire brigades have been heavy. In the first three weeks of August, many specialist uniformed staff manned vans and cars to deal with the grass fires, and off-duty personnel were recalled for duty. Some departments have not yet recovered from the backlog of administration work that was caused. For such unusual circumstances, compensation ought to be paid.

Bonfire night and the end of December, when there was severe weather, saw more increases in activity. On 30 and 31 December brigade control handled 763 and 728 calls respectively—twice as many as the norm. A great deal of additional overtime and wear and tear to vehicles was incurred in 1995 owing to the additional number of incidents, but no additional funding has been provided to help the service cope with these unpredictable circumstances.

I do not want to make a political point directly, but in the long term if we are penny wise and pound foolish there will be a regrettable loss of life and limb. That will have certain political consequences for the Government at the next general election.

12.10 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) on winning the ballot, and on raising this important subject. I also congratulate him on his thoughtful and effective speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), in her customary way, made some sound, commonsense points not just about Cheshire but about the fire service's wider problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) has just given us a detailed account of the difficulties confronting the Greater Manchester fire authority. I know that he takes a great interest in that topic.

I begin with two statements which I suspect will attract consensus. The first is that firefighting is a dangerous occupation. The recent deaths of a couple of firefighters have served only to underline that point. Every hon. Member will want to be associated with sending to the families of those who lost their lives our deep appreciation of the risks they took and the price they paid on behalf of the general public.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): My hon. Friend may be aware that two part-time firefighters in my constituency died a few weeks ago attempting to save the life of a child. Their deaths were mourned, and their courage was saluted by all. But the local community is very angry, because the common-law wife of one of them, who was in a caring and loving relationship with him for 17 years and who has a child of 10, has been informed that she will not receive a pension, because she is not married.

I contacted Baroness Blatch to express my concern and anger. She responded by saying that, although the matter was under review, even if the outcome of the review was positive, it would not be retrospective. May I have a commitment that a future Labour Government will not just review the situation but will ensure that this woman receives the pension she deserves, so that justice is done?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend and I have discussed that. I should first want the review to reach its proper conclusions, and then to examine them. Generally speaking, we now recognise all sorts of relationships. Divorce law, in the context of pensions, recognises differing relationships outside marriage, and I am almost certain that the review will reach a similar conclusion.

As for my hon. Friend's specific constituency case, I know that there is a great deal of anger in his community. The public admire this country's firefighters, and it would be a nice gesture if the Minister promised to raise the matter with Baroness Blatch and gave a commitment that any regulations that may apply would be waived and the pension granted in this case. That would not necessarily be a precedent—each case is different—and I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic.

My second general point centres on the fact that the fire services offer an emergency service. People in difficulties call out the fire service, and rightly expect help to arrive almost immediately. That may not always be possible, but people certainly expect a fire crew and an engine or two to be in attendance within a short time. Our charge against the Government is that they have refused to face up to the growing crisis in the fire services.

Some of the evidence has already been covered. For 1995-96, the standard spending assessment shortfall arrived at by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of County Councils amounted to £52 million, and the shortfall for 1996-97 is forecast to be at least £70 million. Removing so much money from a relatively inexpensive national emergency service is bound to create problems.

I believe that every hon. Member has received a copy of the letter sent by the president of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association, Mr. Davies, who states:

> "What has happened so far is that a series of issues like capital financing, pensions, fire service training costs, national employee conditions and standards of fire cover have all been examined in isolation, only to find that they are one and the same problem—the need for adequate basic funding to meet objectively set quality standards—and that is a nettle not many people want to grasp".

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): My hon. Friend, as a Merseyside colleague, may be aware that Merseyside fire and civil defence authority, on the advice of the chief fire officer, has just set a budget of £52.7 million, which is £2.139 million above the cap. Her Majesty's chief inspector has agreed with the chief fire officer's assessment of these needs of the service.

Mr. Howarth: Merseyside is dear to both our hearts, and my hon. Friend has put his finger on the problem. Statutory obligations and expectations are not matched by resources—that is true across the country.

The Government simply have no way left to explain their case. The only argument they have been able to produce so far is based on selective quotations from the Audit Commission's report last year, entitled "In the Line of Fire". On that, they base their idea that there is scope for saving £29 million. A more realistic figure, quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich, would be £7 million, which, in a global service of this type, does not add up to much in the way of efficiency savings.

Fire authorities in Tyne and Wear, Cheshire, Manchester and Merseyside—and many other places—are having to make reductions that will have a measurable impact on services. It will mean that fire engines will be mothballed, stations will be closed and there will be job losses among firefighters.

Similarly, capital expenditure was reduced last year by 50 per cent., and it is forecast, from what we know about basic credit approvals, to do so again by an average of 35 per cent. The Government say that the private finance initiative can bridge the gap, but they have not yet been able to point to a single case in which the PFI could be made to work in the fire services.

The Audit Commission report "In the Line of Fire" shows that there are many in-built problems with the SSA formula: pensions, as my hon. Friends have mentioned, the assessment of risk, the application of minimum standards and special services, which are not covered by the formula. None of that is covered. What we have is a working party here, an inquiry there, a special investigation elsewhere. Government by working party does not add up to proper management of our fire services.

I ask the Government to look further at transitional costs, particularly those in Wales and the shire counties, because they are a serious problem. We have government by

[Mr. Howarth]

working party, a Government who have failed and refused to face up to the in-built problems in the fire service. I suspect that it will take a change of Government before anybody with responsibility faces those problems. The sooner we have a Labour Government prepared to accept these responsibilities, the sooner we can start moving again.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): The recent tragic events in Gwent and Avon have reminded us yet again of the risks that firefighters take every day of their working lives. I share hon. Members' feelings about that, and pay sincere tribute to the dedication and selfless courage of all those who work in the fire service.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: No, I have only about eight minutes.

The service performs an essential public duty; whether it is operating as an emergency service or responding to a more routine call for assistance, it is rarely, if ever, found wanting. We are all profoundly grateful for that.

The fire service has been a local authority service since the second world war. Local "fire authorities" have a statutory responsibility to provide an effective and efficient fire service. As a result, funding for the fire service is included in the local government finance settlement, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced in January. It is, I believe, a fair settlement.

In 1996-97, central Government support for local authorities will increase by £966 million. Total standard spending in England for 1996-97 has provisionally been set at £44.9 billion. That is an increase of 3.3 per cent. on 1995-96. The fire service standard spending assessment for England in 1996-97 has been increased by £17 million. But it is ultimately for local authorities to decide how much is spent on individual services, in the light of their local circumstances.

It is true that the fire service is being asked to make efficiency savings, but so is virtually every other public service. It is essential that we ensure that the taxpayer gets the best value for money, as was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), who has explained to me the reasons why he has had to leave us.

When the Audit Commission looked at the fire service, in its report published last year, it concluded:

"There are local opportunities that can be taken now within the current framework. The locally achievable savings identified by this study are £67 million a year. This represents 5 per cent. of the total expenditure on the fire service".

Although some people—some hon. Members, even—may take issue with the Audit Commission's conclusions, I stress that it is totally independent and has an excellent track record in this area. Moreover, its report highlights specific areas in which efficiency savings can be made. It suggests that

"reducing sickness rates in all brigades to the level of the lower quartile would save £17 million a year nationally."

Bringing the level of leave in all brigades down to the level of the lower quartile would lead to savings of £8 million a year; and moving all brigades' management costs to the performance of the most efficient quarter would save about £29 million a year nationally.

The fire service element of the SSA is distributed to individual authorities via a formula that is reviewed every year in consultation with local authority associations. The Government carefully considered the formula for the fire service element of SSAs for 1996-97. We decided that it should be adjusted to include factors for fire safety enforcement, fire safety education and firefighters' pensions. That is in line with recommendations by the Audit Commission.

The process of reviewing the SSA formula for the fire service for 1997-98 has just begun. To help inform the review, the Department of the Environment has commissioned research on the costs of providing services in densely and sparsely populated areas and the area cost adjustment. That adjustment is included in the formula to compensate for the additional cost of providing services in south-east England.

The Home Office is also participating with local authority associations in a technical group, which is exploring the possibility of an alternative formula based on the number of fire stations in each brigade area. Any change to the formula must not unreasonably increase the grant to some brigades and disproportionately reduce it to others. However, the Government are always willing to see what improvements can be made.

The provisional council tax capping criteria for 1996-97 set by the Secretary of State for the Environment allow an increase in net budget of 2 per cent. for metropolitan fire authorities and 3 per cent. for shire authorities as the norm. However, in many cases, authorities were permitted an increase above that norm if the result otherwise would have been to prevent them from receiving the full benefit of agreed increases in SSA.

If an authority believed that it could not set a budget for 1996-97 that would allow it to meet its legal obligations, it had the option to set a budget higher than the proposed capping limit, and to apply to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for redetermination of the cap. Some authorities have taken that option. The outcome of such applications will depend on the quality of the case that is made.

Many hon. Members referred to London, the SSA of which will increase by £1.1 million in 1996-97. Under the proposed capping criteria, the authority was able to set a budget of up to £5.1 million—or 2 per cent.—more than in 1995-96. In setting its budget, the authority would have taken these factors into account, as well as the scope for savings and the availability of its reserves.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): As £27 million of reserves have emerged only belatedly after the consultation period by the LFCDA, will my hon. Friend urge our right hon. Friend seriously to consider rejecting these unnecessary proposals from the London fire brigade?

Mr. Kirkhope: My hon. Friend is right to raise that, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton. The relatively high reserves of about £27 million were referred to even by the authority's own director of finance as needing to be reduced. It is important that the Labour party should remember that so much political activity, which has been referred to by my hon. Friends, is not particularly in the interests of the fire service for London. Indeed, I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for

Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) has asked that an investigation take place into the activities of the authority in that regard.

Mr. George Howarth *rose—*

Mr. Kirkhope: I shall not give way.

As hon. Members will know, the authority has decided to set its budget for 1996-97 at the capping limit. It has decided not to proceed with the closure of four fire stations, recommended by its own fire cover review. Nor does it propose to seek approval to withdraw appliances from seven stations, which was also recommended. It has, of course, applied to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for approval to withdraw pumping appliances from 15 fire stations. The authority also intends, as I understand it, to provide an additional appliance at two fire stations. As hon. Members will know, that does not require approval, and was mentioned by Opposition Members.

Under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947, my right hon. and learned Friend's approval is required if a fire authority wishes to reduce the number of its fire stations, fire appliances and firefighting posts. My right hon. and learned Friend has a specific but limited role in considering applications, and grants approval when the conditions are met.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: No.

My right hon. and learned Friend will also consider representations in addition to those already forwarded to the fire authority, provided that the individual or organisation concerned forwards them promptly on being advised that a section 19 application is to be submitted.

The standards that are applied dictate the initial response to a fire in weight and speed of attack. They rest on four main standards of service, according to the risk category into which an area has been placed. This system of risk is based on the characteristics of the buildings and property in an area, and assumes for each category that a predetermined number of firefighting appliances should attend within a certain time.

The standards are not just nationally recommended, but are nationally agreed in the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council.

The Government consider that the standards have served the country well, but that is not to say that we regard them as immutable. The Audit Commission's report recommended another fundamental review of the levels of fire cover, and we are proceeding with that review.

We are grateful for the assistance of my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) in our consideration of the future of the Fire Service college. We are keen for it to remain in existence. Although it is subject to financial constraints, we want it to succeed, and will do all we can to preserve it.

The fire service in England provides an excellent public service. We value the work of firefighters—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time's up.

Taiwan

12.30 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): This debate takes place at a particularly opportune time, in view of the unfolding drama involving mainland China—the People's Republic of China—and Taiwan. I speak as chairman of the British-Taiwan parliamentary group; my interests are fully declared in the Register of Members' Interests, but let me add for the avoidance of doubt that I have visited Taiwan twice as a guest of the Government of the Republic of China on Taiwan.

There is no doubt that relations between Great Britain and Taiwan have improved enormously in the past few years, and that that has resulted from a great deal of hard work on both sides. I pay tribute to members of the British Government who have been involved, and to our representatives in Taipei who have worked so hard to build up trade and cultural relations with the Republic of China. The House and the country owe a great debt to those involved in such work—for instance, Mr. Morrice and his successor, who has recently gone to Taipei.

I also pay tribute to the work done by representatives of the Republic of China in London, particularly Dr. Eugene Chien and his admirable staff, who have worked hard in recent years to make relations between our two countries increasingly warm. And I pay tribute to the remarkable and redoubtable Dr. David Liu, head of the cultural office in this country, whose distinguished work in building close educational and cultural ties was recently and appropriately recognised by the University of Central England in Birmingham. The university awarded Dr. Liu an honorary doctorate, a thoroughly well-earned tribute and distinction.

The objective indices of the improvement that is taking place can be found everywhere, but let me highlight two or three that really matter. There is no doubt that trading and commercial ties are becoming much closer. That is a two-way process: although the balance of trade is not to Great Britain's advantage, ICI, Glaxo-Wellcome and many other British enterprises are investing in Taiwan, and the Taiwanese are beginning to invest in the United Kingdom. Most recently, a huge investment in Scotland was announced. I particularly welcome that, because many of my constituents have relatives who live in the part of Scotland where the enterprise is to be based. I hope that their families will secure employment in the Motherwell area.

That is by no means the only investment, however. There are successful Taiwanese enterprises on Tyneside, in the west midlands and elsewhere, and the Taiwanese have invested in the City of London. I hope that there will be further inward investment. I pay special tribute to all who are working so hard in this country, and with the British Government, to secure those investments.

There has been a huge increase in the number of Taiwanese tourists coming to this country. Until a few years ago, it was very difficult for people from Taiwan to travel to Great Britain. Although niggling difficulties remain, much hard work has been done to try to reduce them, and I pay tribute to all those involved. We have much to gain from the Taiwanese students who come here. The staggering increase in their number is the most dramatic development of all. When I first became interested in the subject, only a handful visited this country each year—certainly fewer than 100. Now, the number is rising 10,000.

[Mr. William Powell]

It is understandable that the Taiwan authorities should want only the best for students who go abroad to enter further and higher education. It is therefore not surprising that they wish to send so many to our universities and colleges. Although some of those in higher education are pessimistic about their financial opportunities, the fact remains that our further and higher education institutions are the best in the world, and are recognised as such. It is not surprising that so many students want to go to Cambridge, Imperial college, the London school of economics, Oxford and scores of other institutions, and I hope that they will arrive in ever larger numbers.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): The figure that my hon. Friend has quoted is truly remarkable, given that the figure for the People's Republic of China is only about 8,000. That is a major achievement.

We should bear in mind the current tensions between the two countries, and the fact that the Chinese authorities in Beijing have repeatedly suggested the concept of one country, two systems for Taiwan along with their plans for Hong Kong. Notwithstanding the current dangerous circumstances—one wishes that both sides would cool it—and bearing in mind the fact that Taiwan is historically a province of the Chinese motherland, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a great mistake for the American authorities to encourage the Taiwanese population, or politicians, to think of future independence?

Mr. Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for his observations. He chairs the British-Chinese parliamentary group, and has extensive experience of relations between Great Britain and China. I know that his words—along with mine and those of my right hon. Friend the Minister—will be minutely scrutinised by people in Beijing, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and throughout the Asian Pacific region. The debate is taking place at a time of extraordinary sensitivity in the development of Chinese relations and policy towards all China—in which I include Hong Kong, the People's Republic, Taiwan, Macau and the whole Chinese world. My hon. Friend is right to sound a note of caution, and I hope that it will be heard and acted on by the authorities in Beijing.

Tension is clearly rising rapidly, and the danger of a miscalculation could be considerable. It is important that every effort should be made in the international community to lower the temperature and reduce the danger of any such miscalculation. Taiwan's greatest triumph has been its moves towards establishing a genuine popular democracy. It is extremely difficult to do that—not merely to hold an election and to ensure that it is the only election that is ever held, but to establish genuine and legitimate democratic institutions and ensure that freedom can be fully exercised in all areas of life, not just in the election of a national leader.

The election of a President, which will take place next week, is only the latest step in a process that has been going on for nearly 10 years—since 1987—to establish fully democratic institutions. We should be proud of any country—any region, indeed—that takes such steps. The greatest tribute that I pay those who lead Taiwan is to the courage, persistence and steadfastness that they have shown in unfolding their programme of democratic reform. Only 10 years ago, the stage of democracy that is being reached would have been unthinkable for people who knew Taiwan. Not least for that reason, we should do all we can. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary are working hard to ensure that the danger of enhanced tension is reduced as much as possible. The People's Republic has announced that the military exercises in the strait of Taiwan are to last nine days. Clearly, prolonging them would be a dangerous step.

Equally, if the People's Republic enhanced the degree of the exercise and, instead of conducting what it calls air exercises over the sea, tested live missiles, leading to aggression against the islands of Quemoy or Matsu, or against the main island of Taiwan, that would lead to a most regrettable and difficult international position. As someone who has tried to study these matters intensely in recent years, I look forward to a time when Taiwan and mainland China can be reunited, but that should not be achieved by coercion or by trying to undermine the remarkable progress of liberalisation and democratisation that has taken place on Taiwan.

Nevertheless, I hope that it will be possible for all Chinese people to come together in one country, even if it involves more than one system of government at some stage. That policy is being pursued by the Government of Taiwan and by President Lee, who has been responsible for that remarkable programme of liberalisation and democratisation. I therefore support reunification, but not reunification by means of coercion, which is not the way to conduct international relations at this stage in the world's history. As the people of Taiwan rank, by reason of their history, as the most sophisticated in the world, to imagine that the rest of the world community will accept an attempt to achieve by coercion an objective that is shared on both sides of the strait of Taiwan, will cause considerable problems in the rest of the world.

Taiwan's revolution has been peaceful and economic. It has led to enormous prosperity and to huge investment by Taiwan in southern China. Let no one for a moment imagine that what has taken place in southern China to the north of Hong Kong would have been possible without Taiwanese capital, which continues to pour into southern China and to build the Chinese economy. Of course, there is a natural partnership between these people and the wish to bridge their political gulfs is a legitimate aspiration.

In recent years, many hon. Members from both sides of the House have had the opportunity to visit Taiwan. I hope that more will go to see for themselves the remarkable developments at Hsinchu science park, the original one-stop shop for the world, now covering 140 acres. Taiwan's gross national product is bigger than that of Scotland, Wales and the whole of Ireland put together.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this issue and on the way in which he has sensitively dealt with the topics—the way in which he has talked about the immediate issues and the future will unite the House. His comments about the advance of democracy in Taiwan will also be supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is a great shame that we do not have more time to debate this issue, but I congratulate him on raising it.

Mr. Powell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. It is important that we speak in the House with one voice on

this matter because there must not be any miscalculation of where we stand in these sensitive days. Equally, the future matters. Taiwan, already the 12th largest economy in the world, will play a substantial part in that future. It is an economic powerhouse.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister is doing all that he can to improve relations between Great Britain and Taiwan on a number of fronts. My final point may not be my most popular point with him. As Taiwan is the source of the second largest reserve of savings in the world, it is absurd that some international institutions—I have in mind especially the World Trade Organisation, which supersedes the general agreement on tariffs and trade, the International Monetary Fund and the World bank—should not have Taiwan as a participating member.

Some mechanism will have to be found, which may initially amount to less than political recognition of Taiwan, but which will enable it to participate in the world community to a much greater extent than has been possible. I hope that part of the Government's work will involve trying, with other countries, to enable Taiwan to play the full part that her economic power dictates she should play.

That having been said, these are serious times in Taiwan. I hope that the international threshold of anxiety will be lowered. That will be to the advantage not only of Taiwan, but of Hong Kong, of China and of her reputation in the rest of the world.

12.46 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) has done the House a service by raising the important and topical subject of Taiwan. The tribute paid to him by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) is wholly appropriate and agreed by all hon. Members.

In 10 days' time, the people of Taiwan will go to the polls to elect their President—the first time that they have had the opportunity to do so. It represents the last stage in the development of democratic institutions in Taiwan, a development that hon. Members can only welcome and applaud. It is therefore a matter of grave concern that the People's Republic of China should be conducting missile tests and military exercises with the apparent aim of influencing those elections and of intimidating the electorate.

Four missiles have been fired into the sea near Taiwan's two main ports. Aviation and shipping have been warned to avoid an extensive area near the Chinese coast in the strait of Taiwan, where the exercises will include live firing. Such activities have caused anxiety to people in Taiwan—including the British community there—in Hong Kong and throughout east Asia. They have led the United States of America to take precautionary action. Anything that affects the stability of the region that includes Hong Kong affects us all.

Let me make the Government's position clear. We acknowledge the Chinese Government's position that Taiwan is a province of China. The Taiwanese should be singularly ill advised were they to proceed to a declaration of independence or some similar initiative. Our understanding is that the Taiwanese authorities seek negotiations about reunification, not independence. That echoes the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes).

Equally, on the Chinese side, we have no current reason to believe that the present activity is the prelude to a military attack on Taiwan or that the Government of the People's Republic have abandoned their long-standing policy of seeking peaceful reunification, the policy repeated by the Chinese premier Li Peng to our Prime Minister less than two weeks ago. Nevertheless, it is clear that the present position has heightened tensions in the region and is potentially dangerous—indeed disastrous. There is a risk of error or a miscalculation that could have the most serious consequences.

Taiwan is one of the economic powerhouses of east Asia. It is the 14th largest trading entity in the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Corby said, its foreign exchange reserves are the second largest in the world—they are second only to Japan. For its security, Taiwan has always looked to the support of the United States, which has already backed up its warnings about the seriousness of the position by moving two task forces near to Taiwan. We support and welcome the sensible precautions that the American Government have taken.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): My right hon. Friend widens the point to encompass the whole world. Those of us who are concerned about Taiwan and China are obviously here this morning for that reason. Is it not right also to widen the debate so that concern for democracy is shared world wide? Even if we support Beijing, we do not want it to force the extinguishment of democracy as it begins in Taiwan.

Mr. Hanley: I can only agree with my hon. Friend. That is why I welcome the elections in Taiwan, which should not be interfered with by anyone outside, not even China.

The risks of any escalation of the present crisis should be evident to all. I hope that all concerned, but especially the Government of the People's Republic of China, will pay heed to the dangers and proceed with the greatest possible caution and restraint.

That has been the central message of our own public statements about the matter and of the statement issued at the end of last week by the European Union. The Prime Minister expressed our concerns directly to the Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng when they met in Bangkok at the recent Asia-Europe meeting. We are continuing to follow the development of the situation extremely closely and will take all further opportunities to urge restraint and peaceful resolution of differences.

Such a path is not only in the interests of Taiwan and the east Asia region, but it is very much in the interests of China itself. Even though direct trade is still not permitted by the Taiwan authorities, Taiwanese companies have been among the largest investors in mainland China and the indirect trade is worth billions of dollars. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby alluded to that.

The astonishing economic transformation of the coastal provinces of China has, as my hon. Friend rightly said, benefited greatly from this infusion of capital and business acumen from across the Taiwan strait. These substantial economic benefits would be put at risk if the present crisis were to escalate out of control. There could also be consequences of particular importance for us in Britain—but also for China—if the situation led to a drop in confidence in Hong Kong.

[Mr. Hanley]

I do not wish to be alarmist. The evidence we possess points to intimidation and bellicose activity, but not an attack. The risks at this stage are potential rather than actual. If all sides act with good sense, as I hope and believe they will, calm should return and tensions be relaxed. I believe that all in this House will join me in expressing concern at the demonstrations, which are unnecessary and an over-reaction, and in urging the utmost restraint.

I have so far spoken of the relations between China and Taiwan, as they are the subject of the greatest topical interest. I want now to put on record the flourishing links between Taiwan and this country. Although, like our main western partners, we have no formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan, it has become an important partner for us in terms of trade, investment, tourism and educational exchange. We continue actively to promote those links that are of considerable benefit to both sides. So far, 11 Ministers have visited Taiwan in pursuit of those objectives. Only recently, three of my ministerial colleagues from the Scottish Office—it is good to see the one they left behind, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) on the Bench this morning—and from the Departments of the Environment and of Health visited Taiwan to secure further commercial opportunities and inward investment for the United Kingdom.

The centre of our activity is our unofficial office in Taipei, the British trade and cultural office, currently under the direction of Alan Collins. The office boasts seven front-line commercial staff dedicated to helping British business. Its cultural section has an excellent record in attracting Taiwanese students to the United Kingdom. Several high-profile events were staged last year, including the British festival in Taipei and a British promotion in Kaoshiung. More events are planned for this year to enhance British interests. The active British chamber of commerce in Taipei, which the DTI helped to establish several years ago, also offers help to British business men. The DTI holds regular talks with the Taiwan authorities on a wide range of trade issues to improve access to the market.

My hon. Friend mentioned the work done by the Taipei representative office in London. Our lack of diplomatic relations means that we cannot afford Dr. Eugene Chien and his colleagues the privileges and immunities that go with diplomatic status, but we do make every effort to minimise any practical inconveniences that they may face. We believe that they share our aim of developing the practical links between Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

In this regard, I believe that our record speaks for itself. Last year our exports amounted to £962 million, a remarkable increase of more than 30 per cent. on 1994. Recent commercial successes included Davy International's £75 million contract from the China Steel company to design and build a new blast furnace. British companies are in the running to construct both a high-speed rail link between Taipei and Kaoshiung and an £8 billion metro project in Kaoshiung. The Government are committed to offering all the practical help they can in pursuit of those opportunities.

British firms are also showing their commitment by investing in Taiwan. Glaxo has completed a major pharmaceutical plant in Hsinchu and Kingfisher B and Q has signed a joint venture worth £10 million and is setting up a pilot do-it-yourself home centre store in Taiwan, which is due to open in March this year. Eagle Star has signed a joint venture to create Eagle Star Insurance Life, whose operations are due to start very soon. ICI plans to build a second chemical plant for completion in 1997, which would put its investment in Taiwan well in excess of half a billion US dollars.

The United Kingdom is also an increasingly attractive location for Taiwanese investment, as my hon. Friend rightly said. In the past, Taiwanese manufacturing investment has been mainly concentrated in the USA and east Asia. The first investment in Britain was when Tatung set up a manufacturing plant in Telford in 1984. Over the past five years, the United Kingdom has become the preferred European location for a further 10 companies with a range of products from penicillin to hard disk drives.

The announcement in November 1995 of the Chunghwa investment of £260 million to build a plant in Lanarkshire, creating 3,300 jobs, is a sign of things to come. It is the largest so far by a Taiwanese investor in the United Kingdom and, I might add, the largest single investment by a Taiwanese company in Europe. We expect it to generate more inquiries from smaller companies wishing to follow Chunghwa's lead.

It is important that we remain active in Taiwan to capitalise on the potential for further investment opportunities on the back of our recent success. The United Kingdom offers a highly attractive environment to Taiwanese companies, with a skilled and flexible work force and a warm welcome from local and national Government.

In recent years we have also made significant efforts in the area of education to attract Taiwanese students to the United Kingdom. An education fair, with representatives' attending from all major British colleges and universities, is held every year. There are now more than 10,000 Taiwanese students at British colleges and universities and the number continues to grow. We are also benefiting from an increasing flow of Taiwanese tourists and business visitors, especially since we simplified visa procedures in December last year.

All this represents a record of solid achievement in deepening the practical links between Britain and Taiwan. Despite our lack of diplomatic relations, we remain wholeheartedly committed to developing closer ties. We see great potential in the future for the promotion of United Kingdom exports and investment, attraction of tourism and the promotion of educational links in the United Kingdom and Taiwan.

Although much has been done, much more could be done. We intend to work closely with British companies to ensure that they take full advantage of the opportunities. We will continue the partnership between the British Council and the universities to promote educational contact. We will intensify our campaign with the regions of the United Kingdom to attract investment and create jobs for British workers at Taiwanese-owned factories. That requires a sustained effort. In the United Kingdom, investors have access to the European single market, but retain the freedom to run their businesses as they wish—and an overseas investor in the United Kingdom has all the rights and privileges of a British investor. No wonder we are doing so well together.

I know that the House will join me in congratulating my hon. Friend on what he had to say about the excellent relationship between Taiwan and the United Kingdom. The fact that he spoke without a note in his hand shows that he spoke from the heart. There are many here who hold Taiwan in their hearts.

Mr. Charlie Thom

1 pm

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): This debate has been rather overshadowed by events in Scotland today. I understand that at Dunblane primary school in Dunblane 13 children and two adults have been killed and eight others have been injured. I offer my sincere condolences to the families and relatives of those killed or injured in the tragedy. I understand that, later today, formal statements will be made by the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House. I also understand that the Minister of State wants to say a few words, and I give way to him.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): The whole House will share the sense of distress, horror and outrage that children lost their lives at Dunblane primary school this morning in an appalling incident. The whole House will wish the deepest sympathies to be expressed to the families of the victims and to the families of those who have been injured. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), the shadow Scottish Secretary, left this morning to travel to Dunblane, and I understand that the Under-Secretary of State responsible for education, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), is already there.

The House should expect a full statement to be made as soon as all the facts have been established. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will confirm the arrangements for a statement at 3.30 pm today.

Mr. Donohoe: I am grateful to be able to present the case in this short Adjournment debate of Charlie Thom of 35, Ashgrove road in Kilwinning, which involves a march-fence division wall. The case could be considered to be very complicated. Indeed, from reading several documents and letters concerning it, I consider it complicated. I shall try to make it as simple as possible and break it down into three different sectors. The first concerns the courts, the second concerns politicians and the Government and the third concerns the Scottish Law Commission.

I shall try to approach the matter from a simple commonsense point of view and outline the case briefly. I understand that the wall was built in the early 1950s and that a wooden fence was subsequently built next to it without Mr. Thom's permission. Lord Jauncey, the Lord Ordinary, heard the case over 28 days in 1987 and, on 24 April 1987, came to the conclusion that the case was not made by Mr. Thom. He said that huge sums of money had been spent in defending and prosecuting the case. It has been estimated that more than £50,000 was spent—concerning a wall that cost between £700 and £1,000 to build.

In the opinion of the pursuer, Mr. Thom, Lord Jauncey's statement ignored all previous decisions. To find case history, one has to go back to the 19th century, when there were five cases that specifically concerned boundary walls. The first such case was Wallace *v.* Brown on 21 January 1808, and the last was Cochran's Travellers *v.* Caledonian Railway Company in 1898.

[Mr. Donohoe]

Mr. Thom argues that Lord Jauncey came to his conclusion on the basis of tenement gable cases in the 1900s and took into account the minority view of the last case in the previous century, to which I have referred. Lord Jauncey concluded:

"However I can see no reason why the principles of law applicable to the interest in a gable built half on A's land and half on B's land should differ from the principles applicable to the simple division wall similarly built".

I understand that the Scottish Office Minister became involved on 27 October 1987, when he wrote:

"The Secretary of State cannot interfere in the judgements of the courts. Such judgements can only be overturned in the normal manner by appealing to a higher court and Mr. Thom should consult his own solicitor regarding this."

Two Lord Advocates became involved in the case. The first, Lord Cameron of Lochbroom, said on 21 December that Mr. Thom should refer the matter to the Scottish Law Commission, as did his successor, Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, on 2 March 1992.

At about the same time, Mr. Thom wrote to the Faculty of Advocates, and on 4 June 1993 was told by the dean of the faculty to take the matter up with the deputy principal clerk of session. That had disastrous consequences for Mr. Thom, of which I am sure the Minister is aware. It has caused such a delay that the case has still not been considered by a judge.

After a fairly lengthy written and verbal dialogue with Mr. Thom, the third vehicle in the case, the Scottish Law Commission, produced a consultation document in June 1992. It was very supportive, as was a letter from Lord Davidson, the chairman of the commission. Shortly before the research undertaken by the commission on the subject was completed, Lord Davidson said:

"case law on the subject is in disarray".

I would argue that there is a remedy. It is clear that the law on dividing walls is in total disarray. The law faces two ways and there are two lines of decision that cannot satisfactorily be reconciled. It is clear that my constituent no longer has any confidence in the Scottish legal system—and with some justification, given what I have described. The extent of the events that have occurred in the Scottish Court Service is astonishing, as I understand the Minister is aware.

What can we do to remedy the situation? For one part, compensation is due. We need only to approach the matter from a commonsense point of view. Everyone knows that it is not possible to own half a brick, yet the judgment seems to suggest that it is. As it is not possible to own half a child, it is certainly not possible to own half a brick. Such a premise makes a nonsense of the law, and the law falls into disrepute in the eyes of the public as a result.

Lord Jauncey had absolutely no right or power to change the law. As I understand it, to change a point of law in Scotland, five judges sitting together are required to make a majority decision. A single judge does not have that power.

The only other two ways in which the law can be changed are through the House of Lords, on a case basis, and through the House of Commons, by statute or by parliamentary order. Those are clearly not open to Mr. Thom. In terms of his rights of appeal, it would be nonsense for him to approach the case from the angle suggested by many people. The use of judicial discretion in the case has been highly questionable.

The most recent annual report of the Scottish Law Commission said that the case would have to be set aside because, as with other cases of equal importance, more resources are needed from the Government to continue with it. The Government must examine the resourcing of the Scottish Law Commission. In my discussions with the commission, that fact has been clearly borne out.

The time spent on the case has been inordinate. My constituent has been almost literally banging his head against a brick wall for more than 15 years. He feels that the system of law has been ganging up against him, and that there has been some form of collusion. So far as I can determine, all facets of the law suggest that he has a right of appeal. The Scottish Law Commission alone stands against that possibility.

About 3,000 years ago, in a book called the Mishnah, the Jews determined what would happen if two parties decided to build a dividing wall:

"If they acted with each other's consent, they should build the wall in the middle and make the boundary mark on either side; hence if the wall fell down the place and the stones belong to them both."

I fail to understand why, if the Jews could get it right 3,000 years ago, the Government in Scotland cannot get it right after more than 10 years.

I hope that the Minister will not sit on the fence, so to speak, for another 10 years. Mr. Thom is becoming an old man; he is 79 years of age, and I argue forcefully that he deserves justice today.

1.12 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) on obtaining this Adjournment debate. I have studied the issue closely, and there is one issue of concern to me that may provide the basis for some claim for recompense—the failure of an officer of the Court of Session to process Mr. Thom's application for a reduction of Lord Jauncey's judgment in 1993. If the hon. Gentleman or Mr. Thom believes that that failure led to additional or abortive costs for Mr. Thom, I ask them to let the chief executive of the Scottish Court Service or myself have details so that consideration can be given to an ex gratia payment to cover those additional costs.

I shall describe to the hon. Gentleman and the rest of the House the present legal position. "Common property" means a single piece of property jointly owned by two or more people. "Mutual property" means a piece of property of which two or more people own a part. The law on boundaries is mostly common law not statute law, and it is interpreted by the courts in the circumstances of the time.

The modern interpretation of the law on garden boundary walls is that each neighbour owns his own half of the wall. The two neighbours have a shared interest in the upkeep of the wall as a whole. That interpretation of the law formed the basis of Lord Jauncey's judgment against Mr. Thom in 1987. In effect, he ruled that the garden wall was mutual property, whereas Mr. Thom had argued that it was common property. That interpretation of the law has been in place since 1886, and the leading authority on property law, "The Laws of Scotland Stair Memorial Encyclopaedia", says that

"The modern law"—
on boundary walls—
"is not now in doubt".

The Scottish Law Commission is now examining the subject of property law, including the law relating to boundary walls. We shall consider carefully any recommendation that it makes in due course. In the meantime, there is no reason to say that the law is unclear or in disarray.

Mr. Donohoe: Surely the Minister must recognise the fact that the Scottish Law Commission has been dealing with the case for seven years. We require a decision in the near future, not one that will take two, three or four years. Some effort is needed, because the Law Commission has no resources to complete the consultation process and present to the necessary authorities the solution to the problem.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My understanding is that the Law Commission is considering its conclusions, which will reach the Government without undue delay. I shall certainly ensure that the commission is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern that the matter should be processed without unnecessary delay.

I shall now deal with some of the specific issues that the hon. Gentleman raised. First, he asked about the description of the boundary wall in Mr. Thom's title to his property. In the title deeds, the wall is described as mutual property between the two householders. The hon. Gentleman argued that the terms "mutual property" and "common property" mean the same thing, but I must disagree. That was a key point argued by Mr. Thom in his original case before the Court of Session, and one that Lord Jauncey considered closely in his judgment.

That judgment distinguishes clearly between the idea of mutual interest in property and the legal concept of common property. Lord Jauncey refers to that distinction as it applies in many areas of property law. Put simply, mutual interest means very much what the ordinary sense of the term implies: both parties share an interest in the overall piece of property, although they separately own only individual parts of it.

Having property in common involves a much closer relationship, because the parties are held to be joint owners of the whole property and therefore have to agree about how any part of it is treated, and share the costs of upkeep. As I made clear earlier, the law as it stands treats garden walls, such as Mr. Thom's wall, as mutual between the householders and not as common property. That is a sensible approach.

Indeed, it could be argued that treating a garden wall as common property in the strict legal sense would raise a lot more problems than it would solve. For example, should it be necessary for the party on one side of the wall to get agreement from his neighbour before he can fix a trellis to the wall and grow roses up it? That could be the effect of regarding such a wall as common property. If a garden wall built on both sides of the dividing line between two pieces of ground is regarded as common property, should the ground on which the wall is built not also be regarded as held in common?

The hon. Gentleman also suggested that the papers issued by the Scottish Law Commission following Mr. Thom's case implied that the commission—

Mr. Donohoe: On the question of a common wall versus a mutual wall, does the Minister not concede that the Thom case itself changed the definition? Before that, all case law was seen by others as based on 18th and 19th-century case history, and Lord Jauncey could show nothing to suggest that a change had taken place between the 19th century and the 20th century. Clearly from a commonsense point of view, nobody could understand what a "mutual wall" means in real terms. Does not that demonstrate a fundamental failure in Lord Jauncey's approach, in terms of common sense?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The modern interpretation of the law on garden boundary walls is that each of the neighbours owns his or her own half of the wall concerned and they have a shared interest. The hon. Gentleman may disapprove of that, but that is the position. The hon. Gentleman may want to return to the position as it was hundreds of years ago, but I suspect that, were we to do that, many people would argue that we should bring the law up to date.

We are awaiting the conclusion of the Scottish Law Commission, which I hope will not take too long. I strongly disagree with the hon. Gentleman's view that "common property" and "mutual property" mean the same thing. The consultation paper issued by the commission makes clear distinctions between the technical meaning of "common property" and the sense of the term "mutual property".

The paper refers specifically to the outcome of Mr. Thom's original case, not to Mr. Thom's view of the law. It also says that the paper is published

"for comment and criticism and does not represent the final views of the Scottish Law Commission".

As the commission has still to complete its report on those issues, its final views are not known.

I was interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman said about Jewish law on boundaries between property. I admit that much of that was new to me, but the Scottish Office is always ready to consider and learn from good practice from other jurisdictions and I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would let me have papers on the Jewish legal framework. We shall study them with considerable interest.

The hon. Gentleman described the law on boundary walls as being "in disarray" and said that the interest shown by the Scottish Law Commission in Mr. Thom's case showed that the commission supported that view. The law is not in disarray. I draw the attention of the House to the firm statement about the law on boundary walls made in paragraph 223 of the current edition of Stair's "Laws of Scotland":

"The modern law is not now in doubt . . . each proprietor owns to the mid-point".

I am aware of no justification for the suggestion that the Scottish Law Commission supports the idea that the law is "in disarray". The commission has a long-standing project reviewing the whole law of property, the feudal system and the law of the tenement. It has included in that project consideration of the law on boundary walls. It issued its consultation paper in 1992 and has yet to issue its conclusions. If the commission had believed that the law on boundary walls was in a critical condition, it would have made specific recommendations on the subject much earlier.

Following on from that point, I should address the hon. Gentleman's concern—

Mr. Donohoe *rose—*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: May I develop this point? I should address the hon. Gentleman's concern that the commission's review of the issues surrounding property law has taken a long time. The commission's considered views on the specific legal issues relating to boundary walls will not be available for some time but, as I explained, the commission takes the view that there are many detailed and related issues covering the whole law surrounding property where interests may overlap or be shared. The commission wishes to explore all those issues carefully before producing final views about any aspect of property law. The commission is right to take a prudent approach. The hon. Gentleman eloquently argued the importance of the law relating to property, especially domestic property. It is important that all the complex and related issues should be carefully considered.

On the issue of compensation for Mr. Thom, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept that there can be—

Mr. Donohoe: Obviously the Minister was not listening to what I said about the Scottish Law Commission. Viscount Davidson, the chairman, wrote to Mr. Thom on 16 October 1990 to say that, having researched the matter, he believed the law to be in disarray. That was in 1990; here we are in 1996, and nothing has been resolved. The latest—30th—annual report of the Scottish Law Commission says about boundary walls:

"Because of the need to divert resources to more urgent matters, this project has been temporarily suspended."

That gives no sign of the urgency that should be applied to the matter by the Government and legal departments.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman may believe that changing overnight the law on such an issue, the interpretation of which is clear in the courts, would solve many problems, but it might create many more problems. It is the job of the Scottish Law Commission to investigate all the complexities surrounding the matter and reach conclusions. That it will do, and it would be wrong for the Scottish Office to try to pre-empt its consideration because, if it were to do so and it introduced legislation, that legislation might have to be changed immediately in the light of all the evidence.

The hon. Gentleman draws only one case to the attention of the House.

Mr. Donohoe *rose—*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: May I go on to discuss consultation? I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept, as I do, that there can be no suggestion of compensation for costs arising from the original court case. Mr. Thom initiated the action against his neighbour at his own instance and chose to persist in that action. The judge found against Mr. Thom and awarded restricted expenses against him. It would be wrong for the Scottish Office to take a different view and award compensation to Mr. Thom, and it would be unfair to the other party in the case, his neighbour, who is also a constituent of the hon. Gentleman.

I can see no case for compensating Mr. Thom for costs that he incurred in pursuing his view of the law with the Scottish Law Commission and others; he did so by choice. Although the commission has been grateful for Mr. Thom's detailed submissions, it does not necessarily share Mr. Thom's view of the law, although it did use some aspects of the original case as material in its 1992 consultation paper. That paper records the position of both sides in the dispute and, of course, Lord Jauncey's judgment.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a possible judicial review of Mr. Thom's case. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates why I cannot respond directly: it is for the courts, not the Scottish Office, to decide on individual legal cases. In this instance, Mr. Thom has unsuccessfully sought to bring his case to appeal and has since tabled another application to the Court of Session, which remains outstanding, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on that aspect of the case at this stage.

The current law in Scotland in relation to domestic boundary walls is clear. Both householders own their half of the wall and they have a shared interest in the wall as a whole. That is a practical and commonsense view, and I suspect that many householders regard it as sensible. There may be a case for placing the current law on a statutory footing, but that issue can be argued with intensity both ways and it is best tackled when we have the considered views of the Scottish Law Commission on all related property law issues.

Finally, while I admire the tenacity shown by the hon. Gentleman's constituent in pursuing his view of the law, I cannot support his or the hon. Gentleman's conclusion that the law relating to boundary walls requires urgent change. The view of the law that Mr. Thom holds is based on judgments made in the 19th century. I cannot help feeling that, if the original case had gone in favour of Mr. Thom, we might now be debating whether a more modern interpretation of the law was required—perhaps at the instigation of another constituent of the hon. Gentleman.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter, and Mr. Thom's energy and application in pursuing a complex point of law are worthy of remark. Mr. Thom's case is a telling example of how a small domestic dispute can involve complex legal issues.

I consulted "The Laws of Scotland Stair Memorial Encyclopaedia" on boundary walls and fences. It begins with a short paragraph that hon. Members may believe sounds a warning note. In earlier times, boundaries, or "marches" as they were known, were set out with markers called march-stones, rather than walls or fences. March-stones could be moved and so were not entirely reliable. Stair records:

"When march-stones are solemnly set, boys used sometimes to be laid upon them and sharply whipt, whereby they will be able to remember, and be good witnesses as to those marches when they are old, that impression on their fancy lasting long."

The more modern use of boundary fences and walls may lead to some difficult legal problems, but at least small boys can rejoice in that connection.

As I understand it, the original case involving Mr. Thom began as a result of long-standing disagreement between him and his next-door neighbour. It centred on the boundary wall between the two properties. In 1982, Mr. Thom's neighbour created a fence along her side of the boundary wall. Mr. Thom argued that the erection of the fence had damaged the foundations of the wall and that the action of the wind on the fence caused further damage to

the wall structure. In 1983, Mr. Thom raised an action in the Court of Session seeking a declaration that the wall was common property and that his neighbour should do nothing that would affect the wall without his consent. He sought to have the fence removed and the wall restored to its original condition.

The case was strongly contested on both sides, with Mr. Thom representing himself from a very early stage in the proceedings. By the time the case came before the court, the judge, Lord Jauncey, was so concerned about the expense of money and time on the case that he tried to encourage the parties to settle their dispute between themselves. He pointed out that the combined cost of replacing both the fence and wall was only about £2,000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

Electricity Generation (Billingshurst)

1.30 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I have to tell the House a cautionary tale of an event that has occurred in a beautiful part of my constituency, called Five Oaks, which lies between Billingshurst and Slinfold. It is an example of what can happen under existing planning legislation through expansion, by stealth in this case, by the utilities.

Without warning, in an attractive rural area, but close to a number of residential properties, a substantial diesel-fired 10 MW power generating station has been added to the three transformers and small brick shed that previously stood on the site.

The site itself has expanded, and the character of the undertaking has totally changed. The five new diesel generators, with tall gleaming chimneys, together with two massive oil storage tanks and associated pipework, completely dwarf the original set of buildings. The oil tanks and the associated pipework lie outside the fenced enclosures that formed the original transformer station.

The new installation is quite unprotected against vandalism. No proper precautions were taken against the leakage of oil and chemicals into the site and thence into the adjoining watercourse. That is exactly what has happened, with neat diesel being discharged from a field drain from the site.

Mr. Kelly, the clerk of Slinfold parish council, has told me that the council was given no notice of the development. He also told me that a fire has occurred, and a spillage of ethylene and 100 litres of diesel oil, which have polluted the river. That river is next to the watercourse, which flows into the Adur river, a short distance to the south. It is clear from what has happened that the development is a major potential hazard.

The other environmental consequence to consider is the damage caused by noise and the smell of diesel as a result of the plan to operate the generator for three hours every day. The five new generators and chimneys are visually obtrusive in the rural landscape, and it amounts to an industrial eyesore in one of the most beautiful parts of West Sussex.

The local community was offered no notice or opportunity to comment on that industrial intrusion. When I heard about it, I naturally took it up with the company concerned, Southern Electric. Mr. Wilson, the chairman, replied that the reliability of electrical supply to the area had given cause for concern since the storms of 1987. The generators were necessary to improve reliability. He did not just stress the reliability of supply, because he said:

> "In addition, small generating sets will be operated whenever pool prices of electricity is greater than the cost of generation. This is expected to be in the region of 3 to 4 hours on a winter's week day, and electricity wholesale prices have reached record levels recently."

He went on to describe the efforts taken to minimise the effects of noise and emissions as well the visual impact of the development. It seems to me that the best way to minimise them is not to build the plant in the first place.

The project was apparently discussed with the planning department of Horsham district council, which confirmed that it was a permitted development under conditions set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Development) Order 1988.

[Sir Peter Hordern]

I wrote to the Minister for Industry and Energy and asked him why those units, if they had to be built in the first place, could not have been built in an existing industrial zone. I wrote to the chairman of Southern Electric and asked him why he had not consulted local people. I asked him how he would like to wake up one morning to see a large diesel-fired 10 MW power generating station erected outside his office in Littlewick Green. I never had a reply to that point.

I also wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment, asking him to call in the application, because I could see no reason why that type of development could not occur piecemeal all over the country. I wonder whether that is what the Government are prepared to see. Of course electricity companies want to make the best use of technology, but that natural desire should be measured and weighed against environmental issues in the normal planning process.

The Secretary of State replied to me on 19 January and said that he understood that Southern Electric constructed the station under permitted development rights comprised within part XVII of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. My right hon. Friend told me that, notwithstanding that statutory undertakers were not required to submit a formal planning application, they had agreed to consult the local planning authority and to publicise their intentions locally well in advance of work starting. In the case of Five Oaks, that, regrettably, was never done. Horsham district council says that Southern Electric's contact was informal, and quite unrelated to whether there would be any significant effect on the environment.

It is possible, apparently, for local planning authorities to make directions under article 4 of the general permitted development order to bring specific cases of permitted development within the scope of the development control system. That is possible, however, only in advance of the development, and depends, of course, on the planning authority being told exactly what the electricity company has in mind.

In any event, any such direction must be cleared subsequently by the Department of the Environment. The record to date shows that the Department seldom overturns the judgment of the local authority. So not only does the local authority require the endorsement of the DOE, but it may find that it is necessary to pay compensation for any development that is not carried out.

There then followed a meeting between Southern Electric and local residents, which should have been held long before, during which the company admitted that there had been just one failure on the 33 KW line during the past three years. There was therefore no need for undue excitement on its part to build the extra plant.

I then heard from Lord Crickhowell, who hon. Members will know is the chairman of the National Rivers Authority. He wrote to me saying that the installation of such a generating station falls outside the control of the planning authority and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. Why should that be? After all, pollution is pollution wherever it occurs and whatever the size of the development.

Moreover, it appeared from the meeting with local residents that the plant is on call to the grid and Southern Electric's supply company. That demonstrates not only that it was intended that the plant should generate extra power for distribution, but that assurances about operating hours were without meaning. So the plant can be called upon whenever commercial logic informs the generating company that it would be wise to use that extra power rather than to rely on the grid. That was never revealed to Horsham district council. It is therefore not merely a plant erected to cover shortages of supply, but a commercial undertaking.

Residents were told that, in an emergency, staff would be summoned from Petersfield, which is about 45 minutes away. They discovered that no arrangement had been made with the fire brigade. It was at that point that the Council for the Protection of Rural England became interested, and lent its support, mentioning not least the fact that, if such a development were to be allowed at Five Oaks under the permitted development legislation, there would be no reason why such developments should not occur in other parts of the country as often as generating companies wanted them.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy told me that the procedures under the general development order would not apply where a station had a capacity of more than 50 MW. There lies the beginning of a solution. If that is the case, why do we not reduce the limit from 50 MW to a much lower figure? Southern Electric is planning a 40 MW station near Reading, and perhaps four or five others.

If Southern Electric is planning to do that, what about all the other electricity generating companies? Under existing legislation, they may find it possible to use the latest technology to put up such generators all over the country in the most beautiful rural areas—including yours, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a matter of great importance.

What is to be done? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will not call in the application, because it is impossible to do so when permission has been granted by the local authority. He says that he is satisfied that the present system whereby the statutory undertakers consult local planning authorities and publicise proposals which would have a significant effect on amenities and the environment works well. He is not persuaded that he should amend the general development order in respect of the permitted development rights of statutory undertakers.

However, this is a case in which the existing system has not worked as intended. I was therefore pleased to learn that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends shortly to seek tenders for a research programme on the use of permitted development rights by statutory undertakers as part of the Department of the Environment's planning research programme for 1996-97.

I understand that the project would, among other things, establish the extent to which statutory undertakers rely on permitted development rights to carry out their activities—here is evidence for them—consider the scope for those rights to be altered, and examine the operation and effectiveness of the non-statutory consultation arrangements.

I hope that this short debate may be drawn to the attention of the researchers and amenities societies, which may have an interest in the matter. The case has shown that the statutory undertakers do not always conform with what is expected of them. They do not always tell planning authorities all they should about their intentions, nor do

they consult local people when they should. The result is that electricity generating stations can spring up all over the country, without heed to environmental considerations and without consultation with local people.

One idea might be to limit developments under the existing legislation to, say, 30 MW, and to limit them to existing industrial areas. Why should it be necessary to generate electricity in the most beautiful rural parts of the country when so many industrial zones are available where less objection would be made? Surely it is desirable to do that rather than to have such developments in beautiful countryside like Five Oaks; otherwise, there will be much more invasion of the countryside as power generation technology improves.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to raise what could be a nationwide problem, and I look forward to what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say.

1.43 pm

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I am delighted to have the opportunity to reply to the debate, because my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), in all his years in the House, has managed something rare—a reputation both for the breadth of his knowledge on key national and international issues, and for being an assiduous constituency Member. On this issue, as on others, he has been tireless in representing his constituents' concerns. He has put his case today with characteristic fairness and accuracy, and so thoroughly that he has almost taken the words of my reply out of my mouth.

My right hon. Friend knows that some Horsham district councillors raised the matter with me on my recent visit to Horsham, and I recognise the concerns that it has aroused. Before I reply, I should like to say how much I was impressed by the town centre development in Horsham, and I congratulate all those who were involved with it. It is encouraging to see a thriving town centre into which a lot of thought has gone, and some fine new buildings.

I have listened carefully to the points made by my right hon. Friend. I hope that he will find it helpful if I first explain the legislation that controls the sort of development carried out at Slinfold, and our role, and that of the local planning authority.

Electricity supply companies, like other statutory undertakers, have permitted development rights under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995, or GPDO. Those rights enable them to carry out certain developments that are necessary for them to perform their day-to-day activities without having to make planning applications.

The rights were given to statutory undertakers because they provide a service to the public and because it was felt that it would be unreasonable and inefficient to require them to make a planning application for routine development on every occasion. Part XVII, class G of the GPDO sets out the permitted development rights for electricity undertakings in connection with the generation, transmission or supply of electricity. Any development beyond the permitted rights as set out in part XVII requires planning permission in the normal way.

In exceptional circumstances, as my right hon. Friend said, a local planning authority may consider that the permitted development rights granted by the GPDO should be withdrawn. In such cases, they may make a direction under article 4 of the general development order, withdrawing the permitted development rights and requiring specific planning permission. Permitted development rights have been approved by Parliament, and consequently should not be withdrawn unless the circumstances are exceptional and the planning grounds for doing so compelling. Such a direction requires the approval of the Secretary of State before it can come into force.

Measures were introduced in June 1995 relating to permitted development and environmental assessment. They mean that, under certain conditions, development under permitted development rights, which normally does not require a planning application, will need formal planning approval if environmental assessment of the project is required.

The measures include a provision for developers to seek an opinion from the local planning authority, with a right of appeal to the Secretary of State, as to whether a particular permitted development project should be subject to environmental assessment, and hence whether a planning application, accompanied by an environmental statement, is required.

Development that is covered by the permitted development order does not require statutory consultation or publicity. However, it is considered desirable for there to be arrangements for advance publicity for individual proposals where appropriate. Arrangements for consultation are explained in paragraph 33 of the Department's circular 15/92, "Publicity for Planning Applications", and in paragraphs 9 to 12 of circular 9/95, "General Development Order Consolidation 1995".

The circular states that, although not governed by statutory provisions for publicity, statutory undertakers exercising their permitted development rights should inform both local planning authorities and the public of developments likely to have a significant effect on the amenity and environment well in advance of work starting. Where a proposal is notified to the local planning authority, adequate time should be allowed for it to consider whether it should advertise the proposal, and for discussion of ways in which the proposal might be amended to overcome any planning objections.

It has been suggested—both by those who feel that it could be extended and by others who consider that it needs to be restricted further—that the scope of the rights of statutory undertakers contained in the GPDO need to be reviewed. We have therefore, as my right hon. Friend said, approved a research project into the use of permitted development rights by statutory undertakers that will form part of the planning research project in 1996-97. It is expected that that will take place this autumn.

In the case of the Five Oaks sub-station, local residents have asked whether the Secretary of State could intervene in some way, but I have to tell my right hon. Friend that there is no scope for that where a development has already been carried out under permitted development rights. It is not possible to call in an application for which permission has been granted, in this case under the general development order, and the development completed.

As I have said, in exceptional circumstances it is possible to make a direction under article 4 of the general development order, withdrawing permitted development rights. However, as my right hon. Friend is aware, the

[Mr. Robert B. Jones]

district council maintains that it was given little information on the appearance and potential visual impact of the plant; nor did it have any indication from Southern Electric that the company considered the proposal to have the potential for a significant effect on amenity and the environment.

A consultant's report, commissioned by the company and made available to the council, advised that the development would not affect groundwater or, air quality, or create noise nuisance. In those circumstances, the district council considered it unlikely that it could have persuaded the Secretary of State that the circumstances of the case were so exceptional and the planning grounds so compelling that a direction would be justified.

I understand local concerns that the development has taken place apparently without informal consultation by the statutory undertaker with those most likely to be affected by its impact in terms of amenity and the environment. I was told by Horsham district council that consultation with Southern Electric in advance of the works being undertaken was solely to determine whether permitted development rights applied. Again, on the basis of the information provided by the company, the district council took the view that the generators would be permitted development, and would not therefore require a specific application for planning permission.

In view of the considerable concern about the size of the generators subsequently installed on the site, the council took advice, which confirmed its earlier view that the development benefited from permitted development rights. As I understand it, the critical point is that the generators, flues and tanks that have been installed are regarded as plant and machinery, and can be installed as permitted development without the need for prior approval of design and appearance. Those decisions were matters for the local planning authority as part of its responsibility for the development control system.

It is not for me to comment on the merits of the development, but perhaps wider consultation than that apparently undertaken in this instance might have allayed some of the fears about the operation of the generators and provided an opportunity for negotiation about the visual impact of the development. It is unfortunate that some local residents became aware of the development only when test running of the plant commenced, and certain incidents at the plant gave cause for alarm. I commend the parish council and other residents for their prompt action in pursuing their concerns with Southern Electric and with my right hon. Friend.

Southern Electric has stressed that the generators were placed at the location to improve the service provided to the locality, which should reduce the cost of providing electricity to its customers. Those commercial decisions are, of course, entirely for the company to make. However, it has recognised that the delay in commissioning the plant, spillage and the temporary failure of the generators to meet the noise specification have, unfortunately, caused local residents some distress.

I am pleased that the company has been able to give certain assurances about improvements in the operation of the plant, which should ensure that the effect on the locality is minimal. It has acknowledged that it may be some time before local residents can accept that the site will have minimal impact, but it has assured them that that is its intention.

When Horsham district council mentioned the matter to me, I suggested that representations from my right hon. Friend direct to Southern Electric might assist in achieving some remedial measures to resolve any outstanding problems. His intervention would appear to have had some good effect, because I understand that the metal flues have now been painted green, which has reduced the impact of the development in the locality.

Furthermore, the district council's chief environmental health officer is currently trying to resolve complaints about noise disturbance with the company. It has been suggested that that may be achieved only by erecting a building over the generators. To do that, Southern Electric would have to give the planning authority precise details of the design and external appearance of the building.

I very much hope that negotiations will continue, and that the problems will be resolved to the satisfaction of the local community. In the longer term, the research that we have commissioned can examine the question whether the permitted development rights of statutory undertakers should be restricted or amended in some way. I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend's concerns are drawn to the attention of my colleagues who have jurisdiction over the non-planning issues. I also confirm that the debate will be drawn to the attention of those involved in the research project, as my right hon. Friend requests.

I hope that I have set the concerns in context. I understand why my right hon. Friend's constituents are worried about the issue, and I assure him that he has done a great service in raising it today.

It being seven minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BODMIN MOOR COMMONS BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 21 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Defence-related Equipment

1. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of defence-related equipment manufactured in the United Kingdom and exported abroad in 1995. [18686]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): Information is not yet available on the total value of equipment manufactured in the United Kingdom in 1995. However, in 1995 British defence equipment manufacturers won export orders worth some £5 billion. This represents 19 per cent. of the world market and retains our position as the world's second largest defence exporter, after the United States.

Mr. Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the export of defence-related manufactured items is important to the United Kingdom because of the balance of trade and for the retention of manufacturing skills, particularly in companies such as British Aerospace, in Samlesbury and nearby Warton in my constituency, and in a number of smaller companies that supply equipment to British Aerospace? Will he therefore ignore the ignorant and politically correct pleas of a number of Labour Members who have asked him to cancel the Hawk order to Indonesia? Does he agree that if we were to go down that route it would be bad news for manufacturing jobs in Lancashire and the north-west, but good news for manufacturing jobs in France, Germany, Spain and other countries that compete with us in this field?

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend. The greatest care and consideration were given to the Hawk trainer export licence to Indonesia, to which he referred. In the past few months, I have visited the Lancashire aerospace consortium. I was enormously impressed by the high technological skill of many companies engaged in the defence sector and by the civil engineering activities. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to link the two.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the situation would be better if he could say for certain that the future large aircraft will be constructed? Have the French killed off the project by saying that they will not invest in it? I emphasise to him that 2,200 aerospace workers in my constituency make the wings of the airbus family aircraft. If he could say that the British Government are determined that the future large aircraft will go forward and fly, he would give a big boost to my constituency and to other constituencies that have an interest in aerospace, particularly British Aerospace plc.

Mr. Lang: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the importance of contracts of this kind, and I am glad that he recognises that. However, it would be premature to reach conclusions of the type that the hon. Gentleman invited me to reach—it is essentially a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall continue to take a close interest in the contract.

Sir John Cope: Will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that, like other hon. Members, I welcome the jobs and the investment that the defence industry brings to my constituency? Will he make it clear that it is no good us thinking that our great defence companies could function without exports? They could not—not only would we lose exports but we would have to import.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we lost the export market in the defence industries, not only would we have potential difficulties in defence alliances with other countries which would turn to other manufacturers, but it would considerably undermine our high-technology manufacturing base in non-defence activities.

Mr. Harvey: Will the President of the Board of Trade comment on this morning's press reports which anticipate this evening's "Dispatches" television documentary in which it is alleged that the Department of Trade and Industry has part-funded market research into opportunities for British firms to export electric shock torture equipment to security services in middle eastern countries, including Qatar? Can the President of the Board of Trade tell us whether the DTI has funded such research?

Mr. Lang: I cannot comment on a television programme that I have not yet seen, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government deplore the use of torture or torture equipment and would never knowingly support the export of equipment for such purposes.

Mr. Gallie: I should like to identify with comments made earlier about the sale of the Hawk aircraft. Does my right hon. Friend recognise that there are some 2,200 jobs in British Aerospace in my constituency, where, I might say, there will be great sadness today, as there will be throughout Scotland?

I look to my right hon. Friend to ensure that sales of the Hawk aircraft continue to be made to countries throughout the world because, without doubt, finance from that has created great investment in my constituency.

Mr. Lang: I certainly recognise the merits of the employment created in my hon. Friend's constituency as a result of the activities of British Aerospace.

As regards the other matter to which my hon. Friend alluded, which is a source of great distress to many of us, there will be an opportunity on another occasion to refer to that.

Mr. Bell: I associate myself with the remarks of the President of the Board of Trade and the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) on the great sadness in Scotland today which the whole House shares.

The President of the Board of Trade will remember Lord Justice Scott's recommendation in relation to a consultation procedure on defence-related equipment in terms of empowering legislation, export licensing and procedures. He announced on 26 February that there would be consultation. How far has that progressed, when will the consultation document be published and can the right hon. Gentleman offer us legislation on the Scott report recommendations between now and the general election?

Mr. Lang: We are making as rapid progress as we can in our consideration of those matters and all the other matters on which we gave commitments following the publication of the Scott report. I expect that we shall be in a position to publish a consultation document on the export control legislation in the summer.

Nuclear Electricity

2. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the total cost to the Exchequer of the nuclear electricity industry following privatisation. [18687]

6. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the annual cost to the Exchequer of the nuclear electricity industry following privatisation. [18693]

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): The external financing requirement of the nuclear electricity industry is shown in table 6A.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996-97".

Mr. Pope: With the Red Book showing that the cost of privatising the nuclear industry in the first full year after privatisation will cost the Exchequer £650 million, is it not clear now to everybody except the Minister that consumers and taxpayers will be ripped off and that it is about time that the privatisation was stopped in its tracks?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman, as he knows, is completely misconstruing the figures. The important thing about nuclear privatisation is that it will transfer significant potential and actual liabilities into the private sector along with the assets that are being transferred into the private sector. Furthermore, the reorganisation of the nuclear generating industry will increase efficiency both in the soon to be privatised entity and of course in Magnox Electric.

Mr. Eastham: Is it not a fact that billions of pounds have been invested by the taxpayer in the industry, yet it is now proposed that it should be sold for £2.6 billion despite an expected profit during the next five years of £2 billion? Is that not a reckless way to use taxpayers' money?

Mr. Eggar: I recognise the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, which is that, with the benefit of hindsight, I am sure that the Labour party would not have made the kind of commitment to expenditure on advanced gas-cooled reactors that it made. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) will apologise to his hon. Friend.

Mr. Congdon: Given the benefits that have flowed to the consumer as a result of electricity privatisation, what assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the benefits that are likely to flow from this privatisation?

Mr. Eggar: Clearly, there have already been very significant benefits for electricity consumers following privatisation. The average electricity consumer's bill this year is likely to be about £90 less than it was two years ago. Furthermore, flowing from the decision to privatise the British Energy part of the nuclear industry, there is likely to be a further significant reduction, in excess of 6 per cent., in bills in future years.

Creating two new competing nuclear generating companies will put pressure on generating prices and will enable the whole generating industry to become more competitive and provide more flexibility, with lower prices for industrial and domestic consumers.

Mr. Battle: Is it not the case that, so far, the Minister for Industry and Energy has proposed flotation to the institutions without liabilities, and that he has then added in some—but not all—of the liabilities? Two weeks ago, a trade sale to the American company Duke Power was proposed, and yesterday a flotation of shares to the general public was suggested. Is not nuclear privatisation already proving to be a bad deal for taxpayers who will continue to foot the liabilities for years to come? Is this not the last desperate dash for cash for a tax bribe in November? Nuclear privatisation should be called off now because it is economically indefensible.

Mr. Eggar: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's question made it clear that he does not understand his brief. The second part of his question made it clear that he cannot even deliver the soundbite effectively.

Israel

3. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about trade between Britain and Israel. [18689]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): I am pleased to report that trade relations between Britain and Israel have never been better.

Bilateral trade last year reached £1.8 billion. United Kingdom visible exports in 1995 were £1.1 billion—almost exactly double the figure five years ago.

In December 1995, the first meeting of the Israel-Britain Business Council was opened in London by my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and the Israeli Minister of Industry and Trade. The council, established last March by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister during his visit to Israel, is a new bilateral private sector forum to expand commercial links of all types between Britain and Israel.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that trade between Britain and Israel is inevitably linked to the success of the peace process? Does he also agree that the conference of world leaders discussing anti-terrorism in Egypt today will play an important role in the success of the peace process? Will my hon. Friend therefore condemn the failure of the leaders of Syria to attend that conference?

Mr. Oppenheim: We all particularly condemn the extreme cowardice of terrorism against civilians. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is today attending the Sharm el-Sheikh conference, which is intended to put the peace process back on track. We can all agree that it is a great shame that Syria, which is a major player in the region, is not at the conference. Trade and peace go hand

in hand, and open and interdependent trading relations make it less likely that countries will go to war. That is why the growing trade relations between Israel and other Arab states are greatly to be welcomed.

Manufacturing Industry

4. **Mr. Atkins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about manufacturing industry in the north-west of England. [18690]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): Other DTI Ministers and I regularly receive representations about manufacturing industry in the north-west. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, as he said a moment ago, has discussed issues facing manufacturers with the Consortium of Lancashire Aerospace and, more recently, has received representations on behalf of the automotive sector in the north-west.

Mr. Atkins: Is my hon. Friend aware of the success story that is manufacturing industry in the north-west of England, with large companies such as British Aerospace and Leyland Trucks and smaller companies such as Schwan's Pizzas and Centurion Furniture doing extremely well in South Ribble? Does he agree that the cry must be "Do not let Labour ruin it"?

Mr. Taylor: I would, of course, agree with my right hon. Friend. He has hit the nail on the head and he is right about the success story. The manufacturing sector in the north-west is second only to the south-east in value, and there are some well-deserved success stories. I was not aware of the success of the pizza and furniture companies, but I know about Leyland Trucks and its deal with Isuzu Motors of Japan and about British Aerospace, the Eurofighter and the airbus. That is all very good news for the north-west and it has been supported by inward investment.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister recognise that aerospace is extremely important to Lancashire? I am glad that he has met the consortium. Will he further recognise that if British Airways insisted on British engines and on using the European airbus, with its British components, that would be a tremendous boost to this country's aerospace industry?

Mr. Taylor: I have never been in favour of compulsory "Buy British" policies, but we ought to look optimistically at the fact that British goods will sell because of British quality.

Mr. Dover: Will the Minister convey to his colleague the Minister for Industry and Energy the grateful thanks of many manufacturing firms in the Chorley and South Ribble area for the efforts made to ensure that Konver European funding will be available to help us get out of defence-related industries and into more peace-related activities?

Mr. Taylor: I understand that my hon. Friend is talking about no less than £84 million. I shall make sure that his message is relayed to my Department and to the north-west Government office.

Sub-Post Offices

5. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the profitability of the sub-post office network. [18691]

Mr. Oppenheim: This is primarily an operational matter for the Post Office. The Post Office Counters network as a whole is profitable and over 95 per cent. of the 19,500 post offices are privately owned and operated sub-post offices which are usually run in conjunction with other retail businesses.

Mr. Tyler: Is the Minister aware of the recent survey in Devon and Cornwall showing that 58 per cent. of sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses are being forced to consider selling up, chiefly because of the impact of the uniform business rate, which is a Government responsibility? Will he acknowledge that it does not require legislation to extend hardship relief to all village sub-post offices? Will he also acknowledge how important they are to the life of villages, and undertake to make representations to his colleagues in the Department of the Environment, the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office, to bring in legislation as soon as possible, if that proves necessary? In the meantime, the current hardship relief should be extended to village post offices.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have great sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's points. I have not seen the survey to which he refers, however. We are committed to maintaining a nationwide network of post offices, particularly in rural areas where, as we all recognise, they are very important. We are trying to help sub-post offices, first by introducing new technology—especially the automation project, which is expected to go on stream early next year. We are also allowing Post Office Counters to sell new products, which should help, and we are allowing the Post Office more commercial freedom.

In rural areas there can be problems when sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses retire—it is sometimes difficult to fill their places. I know that there have been three closures in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I understand that two of those sub-post offices have subsequently reopened.

I accept that there is concern about the business rate. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently said that he would look at it again. In any case, I shall certainly look carefully at the document that the hon. Gentleman mentioned if he will send it to me.

Mr. Waller: Will my hon. Friend confirm that information technology and the installation of terminals in sub-post offices will provide the latter with great new opportunities and help to secure their position in the many communities in which they play such an important role?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are pushing forward the automation project as rapidly as possible. I am pleased to say that we hope that the first terminals will be installed at the beginning of next year; others will then rapidly be installed over the course of 1997.

Dr. Howells: Why has there been such a delay in the installation of new equipment in the 20,000 sub-post offices? Why has the cost of administering the private finance initiative to pay for this work mounted so rapidly? The public sector team allocated to the project has grown to at least 100 officials, and bidding costs alone will amount to £40 million—several times the cost of a traditional procurement.

Mr. Oppenheim: With respect, I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has got his facts exactly right. This is a very large project which involves linking in Departments such as the Department of Social Security. It is important for that Department's recipients that we get the technology right. We are determined to ensure that when it goes in, it works properly. That is better than rushing it, with the result that some social security recipients might end up with problems. It is an enormous project. Automation equipment will be installed in almost 20,000 sub-post offices and post offices. As far as I am aware, the project is unique in the western world. I do not think that any other country is pushing forward automation as radically as we are. It is important that we get it right, and I am confident that the first terminals will come on stream next year.

Mr. Harris: I accept that there is a real problem with the uniform business rate, but does my hon. Friend agree that the incomes of many rural post offices and sub-post offices have been boosted considerably by the national lottery, and does he have any figures on that?

Mr. Oppenheim: I do not have any figures to hand, but my hon. Friend is right. The incomes of sub-post offices have been boosted by the national lottery, and the range of new products that we are allowing Post Office Counters to sell will particularly help to maintain the rural network.

Overall, there are some 19,500 post offices, and the number has changed little over the past six years. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that the post office network is maintained, because we recognise how important it is to rural areas.

Merchant Shipbuilding

7. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the approximate number of men and women currently employed in (a) merchant shipbuilding yards and (b) oil and gas fabrication yards; and what were the equivalent figures in 1987. [18694]

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): On the latest available figures—for 1993—39,900 men and 3,800 women were employed in shipbuilding, ship repair and boatbuilding, compared with 53,000 men and 4,400 women in 1987. Comparable figures between the two years for shipbuilding alone are not available.

Statistics are not collected for oil and gas fabrication yards on their own, but the Offshore Contractors Association estimates that up to 10,000 men and women are employed by such yards.

Dr. Godman: Is the Minister in a position to estimate how many of those employees are apprentices? In the distant past when I was an apprentice shipwright, the employment ratio was one apprentice for every six tradesmen. What is the Minister's Department doing to ensure that those skills are maintained by a healthy number of apprenticeships being served by young men and women, or is it standing idly by and allowing those skills to run down?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman and I can claim some brotherhood on this matter because I also served an industrial apprenticeship. I am fully aware of the value of an apprentice education and of its value to the nation. I must point out, however, that this is a matter for the Department for Education and Employment, with which we are in communication. We want more modern apprenticeships to give that core technology and skills base and to move it forward. At the moment, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the figures, but I can tell him that in the period about which he asked, although the number of employees decreased, efficiency in British yards increased from some 247,000 tonnes to some 288,000 tonnes, so there has been an improvement.

Mr. Batiste: Although all of us would like more young people to obtain relevant industrial qualifications, what assessment has my hon. Friend made of the impact of the minimum wage on the recruitment and training of young people? Such a policy, as advocated by the Labour party, would be disastrous for the employment and qualification prospects of our young people.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. Companies are locating and investing in this country because we have the right environment and economic background in which they can develop and grow. There is no doubt whatever that a minimum wage would be disastrous for employment prospects. It is not a coincidence that unemployment is falling in the United Kingdom but rising in the European Union, where there are such restrictions. One question that I should like to ask the Labour party is: what will be the minimum wage? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister was answering the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste).

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister share my concern that fewer merchant ships are flying the British flag and that a significant number of them are no longer crewed by British merchant sailors? Will he welcome the fact, as revealed in a recent periodical, that Belfast is poised to become the Aberdeen of the next decade because of its role in oil and gas exploration?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman has given me a very good lead-in, enabling me to pay tribute to the recent successes of Harland and Wolff. I hope that those successes increase, and provide many jobs in Northern Ireland. As for the question of flagging out, that is indeed up to the individual companies involved; it is not a matter for the British Government.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Has my hon. Friend any idea of the number of new orders that have been won by British shipyards for merchant vessels, and the number of jobs involved? Has he taken action against our European partners and others in regard to the provision of state aids that have been featherbedding their shipbuilders rather than allowing the productivity of the British worker to win new orders?

Mr. Page: There is an agreement by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to abolish any direct support schemes, which should come into effect on 15 July, assuming that Japan and the United States ratify it. If they do not, the Government and the European Union will have to re-examine the position.

There is no doubt that there is overcapacity in the world and very hard pressure on prices, but British shipping is doing quite well. In contrast, in Bremen Vulkan in Germany some 23,000 people are threatened with some form of bankruptcy, and hence with unemployment. Here in the United Kingdom, good news is coming through from Swan Hunter; Appledore continues to maintain a full order book; Kvaerner Govan has a contract worth some £61.5 million to build a vessel to support the launch of a western communications satellite by Ukrainian rockets from a sea platform—it should be exciting when that starts—and Ferguson Shipbuilders, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, has recently won an order worth some £19.3 million to build a fisheries research vessel for the Scottish Office. There is quite good news for British shipping at the moment.

Domestic Gas Supplies

8. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will discuss with the Office of Gas Supply measures to improve the security of gas supplies to domestic consumers. [18695]

Mr. Page: I was sorry to hear of the supply failure that affected part of the hon. Gentleman's constituency during the exceptionally severe weather last December. The stringent security standards set out in the gas licences are appropriate to ensure that such events are rare.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister knows that 5,000 households in my constituency had their gas supplies cut off during the Arctic weather at the end of December, with dire consequences. We still await the Ofgas report. Is the Minister aware that the compensation paid by British Gas is derisory, and that the excuses offered by TransCo—that it was very cold, and that consumers were using too much gas—are laughable? Does he accept that gas consumers have a right to expect secure gas supplies in cold weather, and that effective and binding contractual conditions must be imposed on this wholly profitable privatised utility?

Mr. Page: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. He has been a doughty battler on behalf of his constituents. I must point out, however, that public gas transporters are required to design their systems to meet peak demands that are likely to occur once in 20 years, and that the demands in late December were likely to occur once in 80 years.

Having said that, let me add that British Gas TransCo has offered those who were disconnected compensation of some £20 per day of disconnection. Moreover, I understand that it plans to reinforce the local system as part of an on-going work programme—some 1.25 km is involved—to ensure that the situation does not occur again.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that, notwithstanding the difficulty encountered by the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) in his constituency, gas supplies generally are much more secure than electricity supplies, which are more likely to be disrupted by the kind of weather that we have seen over the past few months? Is that not the reason why more and more people would like their homes to be connected to gas, and will he ensure that British Gas continues to take every opportunity to ensure that it is available in rural areas where it is not currently available?

Mr. Page: I can only say to my hon. Friend that the answer must be yes, we must try to ensure that the gas network expands. One of the reasons why people wish to connect to gas is that in real terms gas prices are down by some 23 per cent., excluding VAT, to domestic users and by some 46 per cent. to industry. When the south-west becomes open to free and open competition, prices to the domestic consumer will decrease by a further 15 to 20 per cent., so it is no wonder that people want to sign up for gas.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Will the Minister investigate the Gas Consumers Council's complaints that elderly people have been left without heating because the gas company puts a 30-minute limit on the time that it allows for fault repairs? What kind of Government would introduce legislation such as the Gas Act 1995 which permits a company to act in such an indefensible way?

Mr. Page: Once again, the hon. Gentleman is saying things that are not completely accurate. It is nothing to do with the Gas Act. When there was a disconnection in the constituency of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), British Gas provided heaters for people who were most vulnerable.

Manufactured Exports

9. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value of exported manufactured goods for the year 1994-95; and if he will make a statement. [18696]

Mr. Lang: In 1995, the value of exported manufactured goods was £127.5 billion, a substantial increase over the figure for 1994.

Mr. Dunn: In congratulating all the people in industry who are responsible for such an outstanding result, does my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade agree that nothing could be more destructive of the United Kingdom's export success than the introduction of the social chapter and of the minimum wage, and the implementation of some of the European Court's dafter decisions?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The improved productivity of manufacturing industry has been the secret of so much of our success and of the growth in employment, output and exports in that sector. That productivity growth of 80 per cent. since the Government came to office would be severely undermined if we accepted either the social chapter or a national minimum wage.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the calculation of value include possible losses under the export credits guarantee system? The President of the Board of Trade will recall that his Department lost £652 million of taxpayers' money in exporting so-called non-lethal equipment to Iraq—or has he refined his policies since then?

Mr. Lang: According to my recollection, the hon. Lady's figures in relation to defence equipment are wrong by a substantial margin, but I will of course check them. I hope that she realises that the purpose of the Export Credits Guarantee Department is to provide the insurance cover that our exporters need. It is matched by comparable schemes in other countries. Without it, it would be impossible for many companies to break into export markets and to achieve those remarkable and record export figures.

Mr. Sykes: Following my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), is my right hon. Friend aware that the French Government recently had to export a large contract to Pindars in my constituency of Scarborough because French companies cannot compete with companies in Britain? Is that not because we do not have the social chapter, the minimum wage and the 48-hour week?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will welcome, as I do, the fact that since 1981 the United Kingdom's volume of exports has risen faster than that of Germany, Italy or France, to which he refers.

Mrs. Beckett: Why does the Secretary of State agree with his hon. Friends when he must be aware that despite exporting success, which we all welcome, the level of imports of manufactured goods into this country is even higher and we have a net deficit of £8 billion? Many of the countries which export more successfully to us than we do to them are signatories of the social chapter and have national minimum wage type provision. Manufacturers argue that that substantial net deficit is due to the fact that we have too few world-class manufacturing companies, too few skilled workers for them to hire, and too little research and development and long-term investment. Why do Ministers not listen for once to manufacturers and to Labour Members and introduce the measures, such as investment allowances, that they urge on the Government to help solve those problems?

Mr. Lang: We do not need lessons in this matter from the Labour party. From 1974 to 1979, the Labour Government's last period of office, we had the slowest growth in manufacturing productivity and the slowest growth in output of any country in the European Union. Through the period of office of this Government, there has been the highest growth in both productivity and output of any country in the EU. As the right hon. Lady will have seen from figures published recently, we now have a visible trade surplus with the EU.

Shipbuilding

10. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the future prospects for the shipbuilding industry. [18697]

Mr. Page: I am pleased that United Kingdom shipyards are continuing to improve their competitiveness and win orders in the face of very difficult international market conditions.

Mr. Hutton: What action will the Government be taking to ensure that British shipbuilders, such as VSEL in my constituency, will not be disadvantaged by hidden or indirect subsidies paid by foreign Governments to their shipbuilding industries? Will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating VSEL on recently winning two new orders to build merchant ships in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Page: As I said earlier, there is an OECD agreement to abolish direct support schemes. It will come into force on 15 July, assuming that Japan and the United States both ratify it. If the hon. Gentleman or any company has any evidence of unfair subsidies, the DTI would be only too eager to investigate those allegations. The order for two merchant vessels is a tribute to VSEL. It shows that, subsidy or not, that company has not been prevented from gaining orders.

Sir Donald Thompson: When considering shipbuilding, will my hon. Friend ensure that he does not forget the large boat and yacht building industry in the United Kingdom, the products of which employ many thousands of British men and women throughout the world?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. When UK yards concentrate on vessels for ownership and use in north-west Europe, where they do not face competition from Japanese and Korean yards, they do extremely well. The boat building industry is a valuable contributor to the UK economy.

Foundry Industry

11. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will arrange to meet representatives of the foundry industry to discuss prospects for the industry. [18698]

Mr. Page: The President has no plans to meet representatives of the foundry industry. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy met representatives from the foundry industry on 16 November 1995.

Mr. Canavan: Bearing it in mind that the British foundry industry employs 52,000 people, is the Minister aware of the concern about a crippling burden on the industry if the higher rate of landfill tax is imposed? In view of the recycling nature of the industry and the fact that most of its waste consists of inert sand and slag, may

we have an absolute assurance that the industry will be charged the lower rather than the higher rate of landfill tax?

Mr. Page: All that I can say to the hon. Gentleman at this stage is that the matter is out for consultation. It is with Customs and Excise at present and I know that the foundry industry is heavily involved in those discussions.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the whole question of the foundry industry. I pay tribute to the DTI's Foundry 2000 initiative. For the first time in three decades the decline in the number of tonnes produced has been halted and production is on the way up again. It is forecast that by the year 2000 production will be 1.45 million tonnes, which is a considerable improvement in the right direction.

Scott Report

12. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to paragraph D4.42 of Lord Justice Scott's report, if a fear of strong public opposition was a factor in determining the nature of the answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow concerning al-Hillal deemed by Sir Richard Scott to be a deliberate failure to inform Parliament. [18700]

Mr. Lang: No.

Mr. Dalyell: As a former Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Gentleman will have as little stomach as I have for indulging in Question Time today, in the light of Dunblane.

With regard to al-Hillal, why was the House of Commons deceived? That is what Lord Justice Scott said. If the specific questions that I tabled on al-Hillal had been answered truthfully, would not the whole course of events in the arms-to-Iraq saga have been different? Should there not have been a truthful answer to a proper parliamentary question?

Mr. Lang: It remains the Government's clear and very firm view that the House of Commons was not deceived. I recognise that Sir Richard Scott concluded that some of the information given to the House, whether in parliamentary answers or in correspondence, was inaccurate, but he also acknowledged the good faith and sincerity with which those views were advanced by my right hon. and hon. Friends. It is quite clear that they did not knowingly mislead the House. It remains my view, and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends, that the House was not knowingly misled.

Manufacturing Industry

13. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his policies for the promotion of British manufacturing industry. [18701]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Government attach high priority to manufacturing as an important and growing sector of our economy. There has been an enormous improvement in our manufacturing performance, which will be sustained and built on if we maintain sound monetary policy and low interest rates, and refuse to burden industry with a minimum wage and the social chapter.

Mr. Winterton: Now that the Confederation of British Industry has sidelined yet again its support for manufacturing industry, thus justifying my establishing the all-party manufacturing and construction industries alliance, may I urge the Government to redouble their efforts, as they are doing in the textile industry, to encourage import substitution by identifying goods in which we have a trade deficit, and liaise with industry in bringing forward proposals to encourage British suppliers to compete for orders which otherwise—sadly—will go overseas?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of manufacturing to the British economy. The best way to improve business prospects and manufacturing in Britain is to carry on running the economy sensibly with a sensible monetary and fiscal policy, to ensure that taxes are not too high and to try to improve the education system—often in the teeth of opposition from Labour local education authorities.

Many important high-tech sectors of British manufacturing have done very well over the past 16 years. In pharmaceuticals, for example, we have moved from being the third largest exporter to being the largest exporter, having overtaken Switzerland and the United States. Our aerospace industry has also done extremely well, especially in very high-tech aero engines, in which Rolls-Royce has increased its share of the civil air engine market from 10 per cent. to 30 per cent. In many high-tech sectors, Britain has done very well and it is very important that we continue with that progress. I am not sure that an interventionist sector-by-sector approach is necessarily the best way to take that forward, but I agree with my hon. Friend's underlying point.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Minister encourage his colleagues to stop gloating when the German, French or Spanish economies get into any trouble and remember that they are our major customers for manufacturing products and that when they start getting into trouble, it is not long before we follow them into recession? Will he remember that the lead element needed to reactivate British manufacturing is top-quality managers? Are the actions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment encouraging that development by cutting university education, university postgraduate education and business schools? Is that the right way to tackle our manufacturing dilemmas?

Mr. Oppenheim: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of education to the overall competitiveness of the economy. However, I should point out that the number of people aged 16 and over in higher and further education has trebled under the Government. The hon. Gentleman should pay tribute to the progress that we have made. A recent survey showed that in the late 1970s the competitiveness and productivity gap between Britain and Germany widened. That gap has narrowed by 75 per cent. since 1979 and it is a tribute to

the progress that we have made in making British manufacturing more productive and competitive since that time.

Mrs. Roche: Let us keep talking about 1979, because since then investment in manufacturing has fallen by 10 per cent. in real terms. Does that not explain why some small businesses in that sector are so disillusioned with the Government, who have totally failed to make this country the enterprise centre of Europe, as claimed by the Prime Minister?

Mr. Oppenheim: I am delighted to concentrate on 1979, because I remember that manufacturing output fell under the Labour Government, whereas it has grown sharply under the Conservative Government. Not only that, but business investment and manufacturing productivity have risen at twice the rate they did under the Labour Government.

Domestic Gas Supplies

14. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he plans to extend competition in the supply of gas for domestic consumers to Worcestershire. [18702]

Mr. Eggar: Domestic gas consumers in Worcestershire will be able to benefit from competition in the supply of gas from a date to be determined in 1998. Experience in the first phase of competition in the south-west suggests that consumers may be offered average savings of 15 to 20 per cent. on their gas bills—and more in some cases.

Mr. Luff: Does my right hon. Friend understand that of all the policies that he pursued during the three years during which I had the privilege to be his parliamentary private secretary—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give him a job."]—probably none will bring greater benefit to ordinary consumers than competition in the supply of domestic gas? For precisely the reason set out in my right hon. Friend's answer—the sharp reduction in prices that competition will bring consumers in the trial area—does he understand my enthusiasm to ensure that my constituents have that benefit at the earliest possible date?

Mr. Eggar: I thank my hon.—and close—Friend for his opening comment. I assure him that I am doing my best to live up to the standards that he set. There is no doubt that domestic consumers will benefit immensely from the Gas Act 1995. The information that we have already received from the south-west trial area shows not only that consumers of average quantities of gas will benefit, but that low-quantity consumers will benefit, too. At least two of the competitors have offered consumers tariffs involving no standing charge, thereby exposing as a fraud the constant accusation from the Opposition Front Bench that gas competition will benefit only averagely-off consumers and not low-volume and therefore often lower-income consumers.

Mr. Foulkes *rose—*

Madam Speaker: The substantive question relates to Worcestershire only.

Mr. Foulkes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the Minister say whether gas consumers in Worcestershire, in the south-west of England—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"]—in the west country—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—in the west midlands, not far from your constituency, Madam Speaker, if they get competition in gas supply, will be any luckier than a constituent of mine in Coylton, who on 6 December ordered a—

Madam Speaker: Order. That was a good try, but it is out of order. I call Ms Jean Corston, who I am sure will do a lot better.

British Gas (Executive Salaries)

15. **Ms Corston:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from the south-west office of the Gas Consumers Council about the salary provision of the chairman and chief executive of British Gas. [18703]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have received no such representations.

Ms Corston: The chairman of British Gas has just retired on £250,000 a year, with a pension package worth £3 million, while complaints against British Gas in the south-west region doubled to 3,000 last year. Does the Minister think that the decision to axe 25,000 skilled jobs in the gas industry has contributed to the soaring number of complaints? Why does boardroom pay continue to go through the roof while people are expected to put up with poorer service?

Mr. Taylor: First, the chairman of British Gas has not retired. Secondly, why does the hon. Lady not consider instead the best interests of consumers in her constituency? We believe that competition is the consumer's best friend, and it is about to commence in her area, with a pilot scheme starting on 29 April. That is eagerly awaited by consumers, who stand to gain considerably from it.

Sir Michael Grylls: Is my hon. Friend aware that my constituents in Surrey would very much like the opportunity to choose an alternative supplier for their gas and would welcome competition? Will he and his colleagues in the Government do all that they can to bring about and spread competition as quickly as possible?

Mr. Taylor: So far as I am concerned, we cannot spread competition fast enough. However, we need to complete the pilot in the south-west which begins on 29 April, and learn the lessons from it with all speed so that the advantages can be spread to my hon. Friend's constituents as well.

Trade Balance

16. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he is taking to improve the visible trade balance in the forthcoming 12 months. [18705]

Mr. Oppenheim: Through Overseas Trade Services, the DTI provides the best ever package of information, advice and practical assistance to all British companies wishing to explore new export opportunities.

Mr. McAvoy: That entirely complacent answer from the Minister totally ignores the ever-widening deficit. Is the Minister aware that 1995 was the 13th successive year that the United Kingdom had an annual world visible trade deficit? Whereas we welcome proper measures to reduce that deficit, is not the Government's record appalling and is not the best and only way to improve the country's economic performance for the present Government to go?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to agree with his last comment, although I agree with him about the importance of the trade balance of the manufacturing sector. I remind him that in the 1960s and 1970s our trading position deteriorated steadily under Governments of both colours, but since the mid-1980s we have maintained our share of world trade for the first time in many decades and exports of manufactured goods have increased at twice the rate they did under the last Labour Government.

Mr. Garnier: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways to improve the visible trade balance is to continue the Government's strong economic policies, to discourage the imposition of a minimum wage and to discourage the introduction of the social chapter?

Mr. Oppenheim: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend. The best way to empower workers and increase their bargaining power at the workplace is not by intervening artificially in wage contracts, but by ensuring that workers have a good education and good training so that they are valuable and productive to their employers. It is fundamentally dishonest for the Opposition to pretend to British workers that there is an easy, painless way to increase wages without a commensurate increase in productivity. Come the general election, people will be asking members of the Labour party at what level they intend to set the minimum wage; unless they can answer that question, no one will take that key Labour policy seriously.

Export Contracts (Language Barriers)

17. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the proportion of British export contracts lost because of communication difficulties caused by language barriers in the most recent year for which information is available. [18707]

Mr. Oppenheim: A survey of UK companies carried out in 1995 as part of the DTI's national languages for export campaign showed that 25 per cent. of exporting companies had lost trade due to language barriers.

Mr. Rendel: Given that that must mean a considerable loss of export revenues, what does the Minister plan by way of incentives to British companies to ensure that they train their employees more effectively in languages?

Mr. Oppenheim: Uncharacteristically, I agree with that great German socialist Willy Brandt about that. He was a socialist in the days when socialists really were socialists and one knew where they stood. He said—I hope that the House will excuse my accent:

"If I am selling to you, I speak your language; if I am buying, dann müssen Sie deutsch sprechen."

I agree with those sentiments, and I will send the hon. Gentleman a list of the incentives and initiatives that the DTI is taking forward in that direction.

Mr. Viggers: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is easy for us to become complacent because English is the language of international trade? There is a remarkable disparity, for instance, in the number of Japanese learning English and the number of English learning Japanese. Will my hon. Friend encourage English people to study Japanese?

Mr. Oppenheim: I agree with my hon. Friend. People sometimes go too far in taking advantage of the fact that English is the lingua franca—to coin a mis-phrase—and become complacent. As a result, it can be a disadvantage rather than an advantage. It is important that British exporters should take the trouble to learn the languages of their customers, and I am pleased to say that the number of Japanese language courses in British schools and universities has increased dramatically in recent years.

Mr. MacShane: An earlier German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck—who spoke Russian, French and English—said that learning foreign languages was a matter for head waiters. He was quite wrong, of course, and German business men speak very good English. As we have Trade and Industry Ministers on the Government Front Bench who are barely capable of speaking English, perhaps I should ask the Minister whether he could conduct this Question Time in a foreign language. If he cannot, will he go and learn one after he loses his seat in the next general election?

Mr. Oppenheim: I know from my various experiences with the hon. Gentleman on the ski slopes that he is an expert linguist and fluent in French, German and, I think, Spanish, which might qualify him for a job as a mâitre d'. When he gets that job, perhaps he will produce a menu with prices rather than a menu without prices, which characterises Labour's minimum wage policy.

Nuclear Electricity

18. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current timetable for nuclear privatisation. [18708]

Mr. Eggar: Privatisation of the nuclear power generation industry is expected in the summer.

Mr. Prentice: Why was there no mention of nuclear privatisation in the 1992 Conservative manifesto but only a reference to a review of it? Is it not a deceit and a deception of the British public for £2.5 billion of assets to be handed over—perhaps to the dodgy American company, Duke Power, whose safety record has been absolutely deplorable?

Mr. Eggar: There was a reference in the manifesto to a review, and it was carried out. It concluded that we should move forward to privatise the nuclear industry. As for the outrageous comments towards the end of the hon. Gentleman's question, there are few things that I despise more than people who bring safety fears into the Chamber of this House.

Metrication

21. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effects on business and consumers of the recent metrication of weights and measures. [18711]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department carefully assessed the costs to business of complying with the latest metrication changes. Between 1988 and 1993, we consulted business organisations, consumer groups and others, who generally supported further metrication because of the very real savings and other benefits that this would bring. The latest changes are part of a process started by the Labour Government in 1965.

Dr. Wright: Has not metrication of weights and measures produced a great increase in burdens on business and confusion for consumers? Is it not even more disgraceful that the over-regulation of an EU directive by the previous deregulation Minister—the former President of the Board of Trade, now the Deputy Prime Minister—was responsible for this measure in the first place? Is it not an outrage that we have the measure, an outrage that it was introduced without discussion in Parliament and a further outrage that it was introduced by the deregulator-in-chief?

Mr. Taylor: That is quite a lot of outrage for one afternoon. The fact is that it is extremely important for British trade to sell in metric units throughout the world. The hon. Gentleman would not make much headway if he tried to sell in quarts, for example, in Italy. The British people and British consumers wanted metrication. Consumers seem to be taking it in their stride, and I am not aware of a single criminal prosecution being brought by a trading standards department.

Manufacturing Industry

24. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new measures he is taking to promote investment by British companies in domestic manufacturing industry. [18714]

Mr. Oppenheim: Low inflation, low tax rates, low interest rates and sound public finances are the best stimuli to investment. Manufacturing investment rose by more than 6 per cent. in 1994 and 1995, and the Confederation of British Industry expects a further increase of 9 per cent. this year.

Mr. Hughes: Has the Minister noticed that our major companies are investing heavily overseas but are tending to neglect the domestic market? I do not know whether incentives are necessary, but we certainly need to invest in the domestic market to increase efficiency and to create new jobs.

Mr. Oppenheim: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of investment. He will no doubt be pleased to know that investment rose quite sharply last year and is forecast to do the same this year. It is rising at the fastest rate since 1988. We are an international economy, and it right in an open, global market that British companies should invest at home as well as abroad.

Conferences and Meetings

27. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the United Kingdom's share of the international conference and meetings industry. [18717]

Mr. Page: The British Tourist Authority estimates that 490,000 visitors came to the United Kingdom for conferences and meetings in 1994. My Department has no estimate of the share that that figure represents of the international conference and meetings industry.

Mr. Atkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that in that intensely and fiercely competitive world industry, this country does well, including the Bournemouth international conference centre in my constituency? What effect does he think that a 48-hour working rule and a national minimum wage would have on the competitiveness of our industry and its ability to compete successfully with the rest of the world?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend makes a point that has been mentioned once or twice already this afternoon. The British Tourist Authority estimates that £285 million is currently spent by overseas delegates, an average of £582 per delegate. There is absolutely no doubt that the restrictions of the social contract and a minimum wage would inhibit our ability to offer conference facilities and ensure that people would not be so willing to come to the United Kingdom.

Point of Order

3.30 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Members will have heard with horror of what occurred in Dunblane this morning in an appalling incident that has left 16 young children and a teacher dead and many others injured. I know that the whole House would wish me to express not only our horror but our heartfelt sympathy to the families of those killed or injured and to everyone else in what is this afternoon a shocked and grieving community. That shock and grief will be shared throughout the country.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is also the constituency Member, has gone to Dunblane with the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who lives there and whose children attended the school where this terrible tragedy took place.

We shall arrange for a full statement to be made to the House tomorrow. I should also tell the House that following discussions in the usual channels it has been agreed that it would not be appropriate to proceed with the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee which was due to take place in Glasgow on Friday.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): The whole House will want to be associated with the comments of the right hon. Gentleman. May I say on behalf of the Opposition that every one of us is deeply shocked by the events at Dunblane this morning? Our genuine and heartfelt sympathy goes out to everyone who has been affected. Our first thoughts are naturally for the parents and families of the young children who have been murdered and the family of the teacher, for those who have been injured and also for all of those at the school and in the local community who have been traumatised by the events this morning.

It is a bewildering tragedy and it is entirely right that the Leader of the House should indicate that a statement will be made to the House when more of the facts are known.

Today, we in the House are united in our feelings of absolute horror at what has happened. Hon. Members, many of us parents, share the grief of those whose lives have been devastated by events in Dunblane.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the expressions of grief and sympathy that have been expressed by the Leader of the House to the bereaved parents, families and friends? May I also commend the Government on taking the decision quickly to cancel the meeting proposed for the Scottish Grand Committee on Friday? That was the appropriate thing to do.

Violating the sanctity of a primary 1 classroom heightens the horror of the event and prompts the question: is there really nowhere that is sacrosanct? Even a closely knit community like Dunblane will have to dig deep into its reserves of human capital to recover from that incomprehensible attack. All our thoughts are with it this afternoon.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): May I associate myself with those sentiments and express my party's sympathy to the bereaved over an incident that defies belief and description? I support the decision to cancel the meeting of the Grand Committee as a mark of respect. I do not think that there is much appetite in Scotland right now for political debate, nor will people want to draw lessons too quickly—until we know all the facts. One thing is certain. Most of us in Scotland know the community involved well. All Scotland will show that community sympathy, support and solidarity in the next few days.

Madam Speaker: I am most grateful to the House. I think that we should now move on until we get a statement tomorrow.

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(2) (Northern Ireland Grand Committee),

That the Matter of the proposal for the draft Regional Strategy for health and social well-being 1997-2002, being a Matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee for its consideration.—[*Dr. Liam Fox.*]

Question agreed to.

Hostage Recovery

3.35 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to ensure that appropriate assistance is provided to people returning to the United Kingdom, having been held against their will as hostages, and to their families; and for connected purposes.

The purpose of my Bill is simple and straightforward: to put a duty on the Government to ensure that people who have been held as hostages abroad get support, assistance and advice from the Government when they are released. The public think that few people have been held as hostages and remember that when Terry Waite and John McCarthy—two well-known cases—returned, they were taken to RAF Lyneham and given assistance. People assume that that is the natural course of events and that it occurs in every case.

The reality is rather different. In recent years, a significant number of people have been held hostage. More than 1,200 people were held in the Gulf during the Gulf war and smaller numbers have been held in several other places since, including the two men who are being held in Kashmir. Although we may like to think that hostage taking will cease, I suspect that it will not. It has gone on for the whole of recorded history and will happen again somewhere, at some time. None us can predict where or how many people will be involved.

It is obvious that what happens to people when they are held is deeply traumatic and stressful. I do not want to speculate on cases with which I have not been personally involved, but I am sure that it is safe to say that Keith Mangan and Paul Wells, who are being held in Kashmir, will have been through some dreadful experiences and will need support and help when they are released, which I hope will be soon. In many cases, people who have been released have not had the help that they should have had.

I became involved in the issue through the case of my constituent Paul Ride. He was taken over the border between Kuwait and Iraq by an Iraqi patrol and given a seven-year sentence, supposedly for illegally entering Iraq. At the same time, a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) was held, together with several other people of various nationalities.

I think that people will be shocked to learn what happened to those men when they were released. Paul Ride was given a taxi home from Heathrow airport and that was the end of direct assistance to him. Nothing else was done to help him. Over the next year or two, he suffered family breakdown and psychiatric problems that led to him attempting suicide by setting fire to his house. The Crown Prosecution Service responded by charging him with arson. It was only after a year of waiting for the case to come to trial that it was dropped and he got the help that he needed.

Finally, I got in touch with Terry Waite, who was able, in turn, to put us in touch with Dr. Gordon Turnbull, who had done the work for the Government when Terry Waite and John McCarthy were released.

That case is not unique. Anyone who is in touch with the Gulf war human shield victims will know that many continue to suffer serious problems four or five years later. The Government are well aware of that fact. They funded research conducted by Dr. Stuart Turner which concluded that psychiatric problems should be resolved. He found that social and financial problems might lead to psychological problems and, finally—and most importantly in the context of my Bill—he proposed co-ordinated planning in advance in order to deal with possible psychological and social problems.

When the money was provided to Dr. Turner's clinic, the Prime Minister commented in a Department of Health press release about the effect of disasters and traumatic stress on people and the severe and long-lasting problems that could result. His sentiments were echoed by the then Under-Secretary of State for Health, the present Secretary of State for Health. I do not think that anyone doubts that action is necessary. The problem is that it does not occur: people fall through the gaps between the various agencies that might be expected to provide assistance.

My Bill sets out to rectify the problem. Obviously, I accept that there are some difficulties in defining exactly who might be regarded as a "hostage". In some cases, it is very clear that people have been held illegally. In the cases of Paul Ride and Michael Wainwright, the Government helped to arrange for family members to meet the United Nations Secretary-General and ensured that they did not face legal costs in Iraq. Such action is not taken when someone has been charged with a genuine criminal offence.

I accept that we must help all people who have been incarcerated in foreign prisons, but I think that those who have been held hostage have special needs. Those needs may vary from case to case—whether it is psychiatric counselling or direct practical assistance such as temporary housing, social services assistance and so on. Someone must be responsible for ensuring that that assistance is co-ordinated and that people know where it may be obtained. We are talking about people who have been through deeply traumatising and stressful experiences: they are not in the best position to make decisions about how to help themselves or to know where they might receive assistance.

I do not ask the Government to spend vast amounts of money or to set up permanent quangos or bureaucracies that might do little for long periods. The Government established a special unit in the Foreign Office during the Gulf war, but it was concerned simply with helping to achieve the release of those who were being held as part of the human shield. No organised assistance was provided to follow up those activities. The Government also funded Dr. Stuart Turner's clinic, thereby acknowledging that a need exists.

In the past year or 18 months I have talked to those who have been held as hostages, to doctors who have been involved in treating returned hostages and to members of the Gulf support group. I have received direct support in my endeavours from both Terry Waite and John McCarthy, who believe that we must ensure that other people receive the same assistance as they did.

I simply ask the Government to accept their responsibility—their duty—to British citizens who have suffered for political reasons, who have been in the wrong place at the wrong time. That aim could be achieved without legislation, but legislation would mean that the duty exists and that something will be done.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Neil Gerrard, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Ms Ann Coffey, Mr. Barry Field, Mr. Bruce George, Mr. John Gunnell, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Jim Marshall, Miss Emma Nicholson, Sir Nicholas Scott and Mr. Alan Simpson.

Hostage Recovery

Mr. Neil Gerrard accordingly presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to ensure that appropriate assistance is provided to people returning to the United Kingdom, having been held against their will as hostages, and to their families; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 29 March and to be printed. [Bill 84.]

Orders of the Day

London Regional Transport Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.45 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Opposition.

Mr. Norris: London Regional Transport came into being technically as a statutory corporation—but more commonly described as a nationalised industry—on 29 June 1984. On that date, the London Regional Transport Act 1984 transferred political and financial control of what is generally known as London Transport, the old LT, from the Greater London council back to central Government, which had last been directly responsible for LT in 1969. As hon. Members would be aware, London Transport's principal duty is to provide or to secure passenger transport services in Greater London, having regard to the transport needs of London and to efficiency, economy and safety of operation.

The board of London Transport is headed by a chairman appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport. Peter Ford took over as chairman in September 1994 and, additionally, became chairman of LT's subsidiaries London Underground and London Transport Buses. There are currently three other full-time LT board members, one of whom is responsible for finance, one of whom is also managing director of London Underground and one of whom is also managing director of London Transport Buses. Additional part-time members, including a non-executive vice-chairman, bring a wide range of outside business experience to the LT board.

London Transport is also a parent or holding corporation with two wholly owned operating subsidiary companies. The first company is London Underground Ltd., which is responsible for the operation of the London underground. Since April 1994, it has included the Waterloo and City line between Waterloo and Bank, which was formerly operated by British Rail. The second wholly owned operating subsidiary is Victoria Coach Station Ltd., which is the principal London terminal for national and international express coach services, serving more than 1,000 destinations in 21 countries, with some 170,000 departures each year. Although VCS administers the coach station, it is not responsible for the operation of the coach services using it—they are the responsibility of the individual contractors.

A third operating subsidiary, London Buses Ltd., effectively ceased to trade when its 10 component companies were sold into the private sector by the end of 1994. London Buses Ltd. was set up in 1985 to operate London Transport's bus services and had, in turn, set up locally based subsidiary companies in anticipation of the new arrangements for bus services in London—although the Government announced in November 1993 that the original planned deregulation would not be implemented before the next general election. LT began competitive

[Mr. Norris]

tendering of its bus routes in 1985, and in 1993 those LBL routes not yet involved in the tendering process were placed on a contractual basis.

That development, together with the sale of the LBL subsidiary companies in 1994, placed those companies on a basis similar to that of the private companies which are also operating bus services on behalf of, or under contract to, London Transport. Overall responsibility for all bus services in London is now exercised by London Transport Buses, which is a department of LT, but with its own chairman, managing director and management board.

Against that background, the Bill is essentially technical in its nature. Its purpose is simply to extend the powers of London Transport in order to allow it to make full use of the opportunities available under the Government's private finance initiative. The Bill has the full support of LT itself. I should say that it was London Transport that identified the deficiencies in the existing legislation which the Bill is intended to address and which asked the Government to assist in taking that forward.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose—*

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose—*

Mr. Norris: I give way first to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman).

Dr. Godman: I hesitate to intervene in a London debate, but as someone who travels frequently between Heathrow and Westminster, may I ask the Minister whether anything can be done to improve the tube service between Heathrow and the centre of London, not just for Members of Parliament, but for visitors from our constituencies to the capital? We hear over and over again from our constituents the complaint that they have to put up with that terrible tube service between the airport and the centre of London.

Mr. Norris: One of the things that I have learnt about being responsible for transport in London is that there are 651 Members who have an interest in it. Although one's constituency may not be in the capital, hon. Members are likely to spend most of their week in it. Certainly, with regard to the licensed taxi industry I have at least 651 additional constituents with whom to deal. Therefore, I well appreciate the hon. Gentleman's question.

The hon. Gentleman will know that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) raised that matter in the House a few weeks ago. When I heard of his complaint I made it my business to take a personal interest in the apparent inadequacy of the arrangements for boarding the Piccadilly line. I have done it myself on many occasions and I agree that the service there is not as good as it should be because of the physical constraints of the layout of the station within the airport and also because of the difficulty that people often have in acquiring tickets, perhaps because they do not have change or British currency in their pockets, or because they have to ask questions in a foreign language or through some intermediary at the ticket office. All that means that the process of buying a ticket at Heathrow is infinitely more complicated than it is likely to be elsewhere.

London Transport has a programme of improvements for Heathrow station. Bob Bayman, the general manager of the Piccadilly line, has been in touch with hon. Members, circulating a note of the improvements. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I will take a personal interest in ensuring that those improvements are delivered.

Mr. Spearing *rose—*

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South) *rose—*

Mr. Norris: I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who caught my eye previously, and then to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Spearing: May I revert to the Minister's remark that this is a technical Bill? Clearly, reading the long title, it is to extend the powers of London Regional Transport. In the notes on clauses, under clause 1, paragraph a says:

"the carrying on by the contractor of activities which LT *do* have the powers to carry on, in particular the provision of public passenger transport services."

But clause 1 itself says:

"to . . . carry out an agreement with any person for the carrying on by that person ('the contractor') of any activities which London Regional Transport does not have".

It makes out that that can be done only with the consent of the Secretary of State. Therefore, surely the Bill gives the Secretary of State extra-statutory powers to let the contractor for London Transport do anything that he and London Transport want to be done. Is not that more than technical?

Mr. Norris: No. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because Bills such as this ought to be subject to forensic scrutiny and it is perfectly appropriate that he should raise that extremely important question. In many ways, it is the whole question posed by the Bill and the Opposition's reasoned amendment. But I shall be at pains to demonstrate in what I have to say on the subject that the technical amendment is simply to allow London Transport to benefit from the full potential of the private finance initiative, and that means the need to extinguish technical bars to its doing so, which I do not believe any hon. Member would seek to place in its way. I will give the hon. Gentleman a firm undertaking from the Dispatch Box that nothing in the Bill is intended to extend the effective powers—the de facto powers—of London Transport or, indeed, of the Secretary of State. I shall go on to assure the House that the intention behind the Bill is specifically not that about which concern is expressed in the reasoned amendment. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me, as I develop my speech, to respond in more detail to the points that he has raised.

Mr. John Marshall: I revert to the question of Heathrow. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most important developments at Heathrow is the Heathrow to Paddington link, which is a joint private and public sector project? Can my hon. Friend tell the House when he expects that link to be up and running?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that investment of £300 million by the British Airports Authority has set a considerable precedent in the provision of privately owned railways. The project is

intended massively to improve the public transport rail link between all the Heathrow terminals and central London. BAA is investing some £300 million in that large and imaginative project, and I am delighted to be able to tell my hon. Friend that in my most recent conversation with BAA, it confirmed that it hoped that the trial running of trains would begin next year, in 1997. Obviously, regular scheduled services will follow on from then.

As I understand it, the major restraint is the time it has taken to finish tunnel work into the airport terminals. The idea behind the scheme is that passengers and their baggage will have direct access to the rail link from the airport terminal at which they arrive. They will not be required to change terminals or to go outside in all weathers. Such seamless transfers will be attractive to every class of traveller, including the business user. In the past, some business users have chosen to use private cars or other forms of personalised transport, especially if they are going into the City—although that can be a very long and arduous journey. It does not take as long as it takes to get from Narita airport to the centre of Tokyo or to make a similar journey in New York or Paris, but it takes a very long time. The project will provide a high-quality link to the centre of London that will be attractive even to those business users who are met by chauffeur-driven limousine, because that will not have to be at Heathrow. It will be a tremendous benefit to other road users and the communities in that area.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): As somebody who served his time during the consideration of the London Regional Transport Act 1984, I return to the question asked by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). His question expressed the key concern about the Bill, although we support the other aspects of it.

Clause 3 would add a new section—31B—to the 1984 Act, which would provide that

"the Secretary of State may by order provide for any functions of London Regional Transport under any statutory provisions to be exercisable by that person",

"that person" being the agent. Does that section, when read together with section 3 of the 1984 Act—irrespective of the Minister's intent—permit the wholesale transfer of functions, either bus or rail or tube, to another body? I understand that the Minister says that that is not the intention, but what can he say to persuade us that the Bill would not permit that?

Mr. Norris: As the notes on clauses show, the new section 31B(1) would enable the Secretary of State

"to provide that certain of LRT's statutory functions are to be exercisable by"—

a contractor—

"for the purposes of carrying out agreements"

under section 3(2) or (2A) of the London Regional Transport Act 1984. That means that the obligations laid on London Transport to provide services will not alter. What will alter is how LRT can procure such services so as to allow it to get the best value from the private finance initiative. On occasion, it will have the power, in a given commercial eventuality, to carry out such functions for itself.

The hon. Members for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and for Newham, South have both asked the important question in this context. I can tell them that nothing in the Bill extends the powers of London Transport in the exercise of its functions. Nor does the Bill extend its field of responsibilities. They remain as defined in the 1984 Act.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that exactly. Section 3(2) of the 1984 Act gives LRT a statutory duty to provide an underground service, for instance. Although LRT may retain that statutory duty, what is to stop it contracting out wholesale any or every line of the network? Nothing on the face of the Bill would seem to prevent that. If the Bill becomes law, LRT could immediately give the private sector responsibility for running every tube line across Greater London.

Mr. Norris: The answer is that the powers given to LRT in the 1984 Act permit it to do precisely what the hon. Gentleman suggests—we should be under no illusions about that. Opposition Members will seek to draw out from me a commitment not to privatise; that is basically what their reasoned amendment is after. In due course I shall come to that point in my speech. I must repeat, however, that nothing in the Bill adds to the general powers that LRT possesses.

The specific power to which we are all referring is the power to provide or procure services in the context of public transport. The Bill represents no increase in that area of responsibility. London Transport is not being allowed to move outside the provision of public transport services. Moreover, there will be no change to LRT's ability to extend the involvement of contractors in its business—save only what is in the Bill.

Neither this Bill nor the 1984 Act provides for LRT to wind itself up. My advice is that further legislation would need to be brought before the House for that to happen. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey would no doubt want to make his own contribution on that occasion.

In short, a great deal of what the hon. Gentleman has suggested is already possible under LRT's current powers. The Bill deals with some practical areas for which its current powers are manifestly deficient. The deficiencies were brought to our attention by LRT. When it first told me that it needed more powers, my reaction was to ask it to go away and carefully justify the need for additional legislation. LRT did precisely that, and has furnished me with some examples with which I believe the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey will be satisfied. I know that, throughout the years he has represented a London seat, he has always been a great supporter of London Transport. Like him, I want LT to deliver the best possible value for money. The central message is the acceleration of the improvement in services that all hon. Members want to see.

On that basis, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be assured that nothing in the Bill extends LT's current power to proceed further with contracting. The Bill simply facilitates what hon. Members wish to achieve.

Mr. Spearing: In reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), the Minister has partly answered my question. As he is contemplating a contract for a power supply company under the current powers of the Act, surely it will be possible for, say, Wisconsin Central to lease the Central line to run trains or provide some of the line's functions and for the District line to have a management buy-out. If that is possible

[Mr. Spearing]

under the Act, all he is saying is that the Bill will make it simpler under the PFI. Will he assure the House that that is not the intention and that London Transport will not be privatised on the pattern of British Rail, Railtrack and the present operators?

Mr. Norris: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. LT may wish to enter into a power supply contract to improve the quality of its power supply. Hon. Members will recall the power supply failures of 18 months or a couple of years ago. Power supply failures account for a substantial proportion of total failures in the system. Much investment, therefore, is clearly necessary. It is likely that the most efficient contract would involve LT purchasing power from a contractor that may wish to sell additional power supplies to third parties. That is perfectly reasonable. It would represent an excellent deal to LT and a perfectly sensible deal to the contractor. We wish to put in place arrangements to allow London Transport to take over the contractor's function and to continue the commercial arrangement without disadvantaging Londoners. That is a perfect example of how the Bill will work sensibly and very much in the public interest. It will procure good value for money and sensible commercial bases for the contracts into which LT will wish to enter.

Mr. Simon Hughes: This will be my last intervention on the Minister's speech; I am grateful to him for giving way.

Clause 2 deals with land and its disposal. Will the Minister help the House by saying what is permitted under the clause? Quite a lot of LRT's land is not used for transport operations. Will it be possible under the Bill—it could not do this otherwise—for LRT to enter into a contract with an hotel or leisure chain to build and jointly operate an hotel, as some water companies did after privatisation?

Mr. Norris: We are having almost a Committee debate on technical points, but as the Bill is broadly technical in nature I see no reason why I should not attempt to give the hon. Gentleman as full an answer as I can.

Let us take the example of a contractor who acquires land that LT would need at the end of a contract. It might involve land on which a power sub-station is to be built, the power project having some limited life. Clause 2 ensures that the freehold could be acquired in LT's name, albeit that the land would have been identified by the contractor, who would be responsible for its development. The purpose is to minimise the possibility of disputes over ownership at the end of a contract. If we did not frame the Bill in that way, when a contractor's relationship with London Transport had ceased, the contractor would then have a sub-station on land that was not technically owned by London Transport, and London Transport would therefore encounter some difficulty in offering a re-tender to another party. We are providing a more flexible basis for London Transport to enter into such contractual arrangements without altering the basis of the powers that it exercises.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I wonder whether my hon. Friend can help me. I am trying to identify the area of controversy between the two sides of the House. Is it simply the hoary old argument about the introduction of private finance into public services, or am I missing something rather more complicated?

Mr. Norris: No doubt, as this afternoon drags on—I mean, continues—my hon. and learned Friend will find the answer to his question. It may well be that, with his customary perspicacity—perspicacity that he has charged many a client thousands of pounds to savour—

An hon. Member: And many years to regret.

Mr. Norris: Indeed—but I cannot possibly say that to my hon. and learned Friend, who comes from a distinguished libel chambers and with whom I do not wish to tangle.

My hon. and learned Friend has put his finger on what is, I suspect, at issue in the "reasoned amendment"—a euphemism if ever I heard one—that the Opposition have tabled. They simply say, "We have read the Bill and see nothing exceptional in it, but because the word 'private' occurs somewhere in it, can we assume that this is privatisation by the back door?"

I think that my hon. and learned Friend has touched a raw nerve. The deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—who was a very vocal transport spokesman and who is, if I may say so, a very great man—has said on many occasions that he invented the private finance initiative. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Hon. Members are keen to press the right hon. Gentleman's claim. In that case, I am an inadvertent convert to his cause. I have been a convert to the cause of privatisation from my mother's milk; the difference between the right hon. Gentleman and me is that I can spell it.

The right hon. Gentleman's relationship with private finance is rather like the late Larry Grayson's relationship with rugby league—somewhat tangential. The right hon. Gentleman's idea of private finance is bludgeoning the private sector into pre-arranged contracts in which the private sector puts up all the money and takes all the risk, while he and his hon. Friends reap a reward that simply is not there, because the private sector never invests on that basis. But, in so far as there is great joy in heaven over every sinner that repenteth, I am delighted that Opposition Members have been converted to the cause of the private finance initiative, and that they are apparently prepared to support the Bill.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I am glad to hear the Minister reassuring himself that there may still be a place in heaven for him, but I am sure that he will go on to reassure the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) that we might all have been saved a good deal of trouble today had it not been for the blundering, inopportune remarks of the Deputy Prime Minister, who became entangled in the debate just when we might have been considering whether the Minister's assurances were to be taken at face value.

Mr. Norris: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, I am relaxed about the private sector's involvement in the provision of services, and that goes to the heart of my

remarks about the Labour party's attitude. Clearly, it is not relaxed. I am because the function of any Government, never mind that of London Regional Transport in relation to public transport services, is to provide or to procure services. In the health service, for example, it is important that the service should remain free at the point of delivery on the basis of need and not of means. To procure that, we should use the most efficient means of investment, bearing in mind the fact that, in such circumstances, the taxpayer is hard pressed to meet all the demands placed on him or her by the Government, whatever party is in power.

In this case, an absolute key to my proposition is that, in the past 10 years in particular, London Transport has made great strides in improving the quality of its services by taking advantage of massively greater public investment from this Government than ever before. My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) is in his place. He has long been keen to point out the extent to which investment in London Transport has increased over the years. If he checks the figures, he will find that, at current prices, in 1979, investment in London was £167 million. It now stands at £543 million.

However, if one takes account of further expenditure on the Jubilee line extension, the real comparison is between total investment in 1979 of £257 million and investment this year—remember, these are at constant prices—of £1,880,000. That shows the huge increase in public finance committed to the underground, yet—all hon. Members appreciate this, including many hon. Members who represent London constituencies—much more needs to be done. We all recognise that the investment need is there. London Transport has identified it. In their plans for London transport, London Pride and London First recognise that that backlog is still there, although they pay considerable tribute to the Government's efforts in recent years to end it.

The essence of the Bill is that it allows us to harness more efficiently private sector resources so as to decrease that backlog even more quickly.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): My hon. Friend's figures are right, but in 1978, the historic figure for investment in London Transport was only £66 million and, throughout the 1970s, the average figure was under £50 million. If he excludes even the £500 million per year invested in the Jubilee line extension, he will find that investment in London Transport is well over £500 million and has been for the five years of this decade. Allowing even for inflation, that means that, under this Government, we have quadrupled the amount of investment in London Transport. Does he agree that, if hon. Members on either side of the House still say that more investment is needed, because of the necessary priorities of Government spending, that investment can and must come only from private finance initiatives?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend has touched on an extremely important point that directly relates to the Bill. None of my right hon. and hon. Friends should ever take criticism of the Government's investment record on public transport in London, for it is exactly as my hon. Friend said—about quadruple that available under the Labour Government. We are trying to accelerate total investment on the basis that we, at least, recognise that the key is that investment should be provided. We, at least, are not blinkered by the extraordinary presumption that somehow investment does not happen unless it is investment by taxpayers. We, at least, look for—and we say so wholeheartedly and openly—investment from both the public and the private sectors to ensure the efficient development of services.

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): Will the Minister confirm that, until 1969, London Transport operated under a break-even requirement, and that its first call upon Government for funding did not occur until the late 1970s, for macro-economic reasons? Is it not therefore entirely bogus to draw comparisons between levels of central Government funding in the late 1970s and the current period? Would it not be more germane to reflect upon the fact that, in 1992-93, core funding for London Underground stood at £683 million per annum; and that, in two years' time, it will stand at £435 million? That is a deplorable comment on the Government's lack of investment in London Underground.

Mr. Norris: The devil may quote scripture for his purpose, but I read from the authentic work. The hon. Gentleman may squirm on the definition of public expenditure in London. He may try, under the great umbrella of the Greater London council, to bury the clear evidence that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet elucidated—and, my goodness, there is not much that went wrong in London during the GLC's years that was not attributable to the GLC. The reality is one from which the hon. Gentleman cannot escape.

If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the fact that, over the past few years, investment has been at even higher levels than at present, I am grateful to him for drawing the attention of the House to that. He is right. If I had picked the most embarrassing statistics on which to judge the records of the Opposition and the Government, I would have referred to even higher levels of investment in previous years. However, as they already stand at an all-time high, I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman is on safe ground in criticising them. Of course, he has not let that stop him in the past, and I am sure that it will not stop him in future.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If the Government's investment in, for example, London Underground over the past 16 years has been so consistent and so large, why is it that, for the first time in its history—or so I believe—London Underground will have to close four separate sections of track and the Bakerloo line for about seven months simply to catch up on the backlog of maintenance work that it has been unable to fund until now?

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Go on, answer that.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Lady says, "Go on, answer that," as though that were a challenge.

First, I shall dissect the question, why is London Transport doing so much maintenance work that it has not previously been able to afford? I wonder whether it might have anything to do with the fact that it now has the money to do the work and the willingness to get on with it. The extraordinary double standards of the Labour party

[Mr. Norris]

are that it claims bitterly that there are inadequate maintenance resources, and then, when the work is being done, it complains about what it alleges to be disruption. It is the most fatuous example of double standards. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), who has considerable knowledge of London, knows better than that. She makes her point better than I could.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister surely realises that maintenance work often takes place because capital is not available for renewals. I am sure that he understands that basic point, and would wish to acknowledge it.

Mr. Norris: I do acknowledge it. The hon. Gentleman and I have had many discussions on the matter over the years, and he understands the issues extremely well. We have an entirely cordial relationship; we get on. I say to the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) that I admit that, as my political career enters its twilight, the matter is more likely to damage the hon. Gentleman's political prospects than mine—but I am ruthless in such circumstances.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) is quite right. If one does not spend on capital, one almost inevitably reaps the consequence of higher levels of maintenance expenditure. London Transport, above all, is based on a culture of safe operations, which means that at no time is safety prejudiced—even if that means slow running or closures.

There is common agreement on the thesis, and that is why I know that the Labour party supports the main thrust of the Bill. We all want to accelerate the capital investment through use of the PFI, which will enable us to avoid producing a railway in which disruption brought about by historic under-investment and the need to accelerate the improvement programme happens more often than either the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate or I would want.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I listened intently to what the Minister said about lack of investment. I think that he was referring to the planned closure of the Bakerloo and Northern tunnels under the Thames. He must be aware of the massive disruption that that will cause. Does he therefore agree that one could foresee the need for capital investment many years ago? Has not the fact that capital investment was not made available led to this sorry and parlous state?

Mr. Norris: The work would have necessitated closure whenever it happened. The hon. Gentleman is—I think—about the only hon. Member who is a fellow of the Institution of Highways and Transportation, and may therefore appreciate the civil engineering implications of the work. For example, in order to ensure entirely safe operation, the work at London Bridge requires continuous periods of ownership of station and track. In such circumstances, it is therefore necessary to close the line, and would have been, regardless of when new investment in London Bridge was made. I have LT's specific assurance on that matter.

It will not surprise the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) that, if we could have achieved the renewals programme without any closures—although it may have taken slightly longer to deliver—I would have been very keen to do so. Nobody likes to announce such closures. Having been satisfied that, for good, sound operational and safety reasons, it was right for London Transport to go ahead with the work and effect the closure, my job was to ensure that the closure was minimised to every possible extent, and that London Transport was able to carry out the works.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I am sure that the House will appreciate and agree with my hon. Friend's explanation of those major capital works. May I return for a moment to the subject of Heathrow? Could my hon. Friend discover what London Underground regards as an acceptable time for anyone to wait in a queue to pay to travel? If it is not possible either to make change available so that people can use coins in the machines or for more kiosks to be open, could people who have had to wait for, say, more than five minutes be issued with a free pass? LT might then start getting people to sell tickets.

Mr. Norris: There are two aspects to my hon. Friend's point. As he will readily know from his experience, ticketing arrangements on the underground are necessarily complex. Point-to-point journeys require a knowledge of station names at both ends, which have to be found on the automatic machines, as well as the journey type—single, child or return fares. Day travelcards are also available from machines. The system is therefore quite baffling to newly arrived visitors to Britain.

London Transport is looking at a much simplified ticketing system that does not require staff to dispense tickets. That is of course where real economies can be made—indeed, it is extraordinarily efficient. Most hon. Members will find it more convenient and easier to drop the coins or feed a note into the machine to get a ticket. Certainly I do, but that is because I know my way around.

I readily agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) that that is by no means always the case. At Heathrow in particular, as I said in answer to an earlier question originally raised by the hon. Member for Workington, London Regional Transport does indeed need to address the issue; it is a real problem.

I shall take back my hon. Friend's suggestion that there should be some form of reimbursement scheme—although I cannot imagine that LRT will find it especially attractive. It will at least reveal the scale of my hon. Friend's concern.

Mr. Bottomley: There is a serious point here, especially for people who are not regular visitors to London and do not work here, as Members of Parliament do. For overseas visitors to arrive here and find themselves stuck in a queue for more than five minutes is unacceptable. Not only London Underground but Members of Parliament have a duty to ask for—indeed, to demand—the ability to get on to the underground within five minutes of arriving at an underground station. That is the minimum that we should demand.

Mr. Norris: I understand my hon. Friend's concern; indeed, as I have said already, I share it. I hope that the work

that London Underground has announced will be carried out at Heathrow can be done quickly, and will bear early fruit. I cannot think of a worse way of welcoming visitors to Britain than for them to encounter an incomprehensible arrangement for getting on to the metro system. That is especially true when we should encourage not only those whose first language is not English but many visitors from within the United Kingdom to gain access to central London via the Piccadilly line.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose—*

Mr. Norris: I give way to the hon. Member for Workington, who has arrived late to a discussion of which he is to some extent a parent.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Yes, I think I am the parent. I have been in correspondence with the director of whatever the London transport undertaking is called—is it London Underground Ltd. or something?—and I do not think that the Minister has grasped what I am on about. In the letters that I have received from him, the most recent of which arrived last week, the hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand the fact that our complaint is about windows being closed when there are long queues of people.

However much I stress that fact, the Minister has not grasped it. I have asked only that, when there are queues, all the windows should be open. That is all—no more. Yet the Minister writes back to me with long explanations about all the other initiatives that are taking place, including selling tickets halfway round the world. Those are irrelevant to my complaint.

Mr. Norris: I appreciate that point, and I explained to the House before the hon. Gentleman arrived that I was taking a personal interest in it. Indeed, he will know that, when I saw his early-day motion, I wrote and told him that I too was concerned, and wanted to take the matter on personally. I can give him and the rest of the House an undertaking that I shall monitor progress.

We are all not only Members of Parliament but travellers around the system in the normal way, as the hon. Gentleman is. Like me, he has every right to feel frustrated when it looks as if a half-time service is being provided when there are clearly queues of people wishing to be served. That cannot be right, and I assure him that I shall take a close personal interest in the matter.

Mr. Garnier: If what the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) have said is true, the answer is to second a manager from a supermarket. No supermarket would tolerate long queues at a checkout.

Moreover, if what the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) and other Opposition Members have said is right—for the purposes of argument, let us assume for a moment that it is, although I do not accept their contention—and the Government have engineered appalling levels of investment in London Transport over the past 15 or 16 years, surely the answer is to vote for the Bill.

Mr. Norris: The trouble with having bright lawyers in the House is that they always ask the right questions. My hon. and learned Friend has gone straight to the heart of the Bill.

We can defend our position indefensibly, as the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) tried to do, or in a concrete way, as I tried to do, but it does not matter, because, whatever the present level of investment, we all agree that more is needed. If we agree about that, and if we agree—as appears to be the policy of the Labour party—that the public sector cannot be landed with further commitments and none of us wishes to burden the taxpayer more than necessary, my hon. and learned Friend is entirely right to say that we should support the Bill, and I hope that in due course the House will do so.

If I may, I shall say something about the Bill itself. *[Laughter.]* It may be a somewhat novel proposition, but none the less I intend to advance it. I appreciate that it may be a risible notion.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Bulldozer Norris.

Mr. Norris: None the less, I shall try.

It is generally agreed that London Transport has made substantial strides in improving services and efficiency in recent decades. The quality of service has progressively improved, and LT has been right to focus carefully on the needs and views of passengers, thus reflecting the principles of the citizens charter—a charter in which I strongly believe.

The citizens charter gives consumers of services which, as it happens, are provided by the state, the rights that they would automatically expect to enjoy if those services were provided by the private sector. The citizens charter has been one of the singular achievements of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. In my opinion, it is not yet appreciated how much it is changing the culture of public services and instilling in them a recognition that, at every level of interface with the public, the public have a right to demand quality of service from operations in the public sector, just as they have the right to demand those services in the private sector.

London Transport's charters for tube and bus users emphasised its commitment to that concept. Efficiency in services has also been much improved by measures such as London Underground's company plan and the contracting out to the private sector of non-core services.

Much of that improvement reflects a transformation in the management of LT and the efforts of LT's hard-working staff, but much has depended on the availability of funds for investment. Much of the underground network dates back to about the turn of the century, so much of it needs to be renewed and brought up to modern standards.

To help meet that need, investment has been running at record levels. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet reminded the House, this year LT will invest more than £1 billion. More than half is being devoted to improvements in the existing network, such as the comprehensive upgrade of the Central line—which, purely accidentally, happens to go through my constituency—which nears completion, and the remainder is principally being spent on the construction of the Jubilee line extension.

To date, most of that investment has been funded by the taxpayer, although I emphasise that the operating surplus that is now being generated by LT is making an increasing contribution. There is often criticism that fares on London Transport are relatively high. That criticism, in so far as it draws comparisons, is a fair comparison.

Ms Glenda Jackson: It is a justifiable criticism.

Mr. Norris: I hear the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate say that it is a justifiable comparison. I believe that in that respect she is correct, but I want to make it clear that investment in the service can be funded only by the taxpayer or the farepayer. It is vital that we get the balance right and that we look to farepayers—those who use the service—to make a substantial contribution to investment in the system.

For every pound by which lower fares would not cover the running costs of an operation such as London Transport, it would be necessary for any taxpayer contribution to make good that deficiency before it could be invested in improving the service.

I am therefore proud that, in the nearly four years that I have been responsible for London Transport and have been the Minister to whom its chairman has been answerable, we have moved from making losses to making a substantial operating profit, which has then been made available for accelerated investment. The House must not ignore that consequence of a fares policy that I am frequently asked to justify in answer to tough questions from reporters and commentators.

Although our approach is entirely right, we and LT are keen for the private sector to make a fuller contribution to investment financing, which I believe is a common aim among hon. Members on both sides of the House. If we can involve the private sector more directly in the financing and provision of public services, it will help us to deliver higher-quality and more cost-effective services through the exploitation of the full range of private sector commercial, management and creative skills. The Government's private finance initiative has been designed to do precisely that.

LT has already achieved conspicuous success with the PFI through the contract we concluded last year for the provision of new Northern line trains. Hon. Members on both sides of the House with constituencies through which the Northern line runs have very much welcomed that announcement. That £400 million deal will provide a new train service for one of London Underground's busiest lines, with the supplier, GEC Alsthom, taking the responsibility for, and the risk of providing and maintaining, the required number of trains to run the service for the next 20 years. Those new trains are expected to begin entering service from the middle of next year.

London Transport is naturally keen to make further use of the PFI, and competition for further substantial schemes is already in hand. To illustrate the need for the Bill's technical measures, I should like to mention four of the most immediate PFI projects, the first of which is in relation to communications.

We have undertaken a project with LT that will require a contractor to provide an integrated radio system for the underground, based on a fibre-optic network. The network will not only provide updated systems for London Underground's communications systems, but will have sufficient spare capacity for the contractor to provide telecommunications and information technology services to third parties. Sharing costs in that way will greatly reduce the cost to LT. *[Laughter.]* Does the hon. Member for Newham, South find something amusing in that concept? If so, would he care to unburden himself of it?

Mr. Spearing: Imagine a cable going through a tunnel that takes not only London Transport's traffic, as it currently does with conventional cable, but that of other businesses as well. At the same time, someone will be running the trains, and someone else may be contracting for the track. Imagine the complications that will ensue as to who will deal with safety, who will be trained to do what, and what the line of management will be.

The Minister should consult railwaymen about the difficulties that have already been encountered above the ground and the risks that have been taken because of all sorts of patterns of mismanagement. He would then discover that the risks to the underground in London would be increased by contracting out power and telecommunications facilities, and possibly ticketing, to individual contractors.

Mr. Norris: I am tempted to dissect the hon. Gentleman's intervention in the same manner as I did that of the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington, but I shall content myself by observing that he has set his face against the use of the PFI in respect of telecommunications.

The hon. Gentleman's stance will not sit easily with that of his colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench, but that is a matter for him. He is pretty old to be a member of new Labour, and I suspect that he might have the skids placed under him very quickly if he goes on in that old recidivist vein. There are ugly rumours that that has already happened. I have personal affection for him because he is a good cyclist and enjoys the river, so sharing two of my passions. I fear that we may be seeing the last of the hon. Gentleman with outbursts of that sort. His point is a logical absurdity.

There is not the slightest difficulty in running the cabling in the way we propose. The only difference, on which the Bill concentrates, is the issue of the spare capacity that the contractor may wish to sell to third parties, the effect of which would be to defray costs that would otherwise have to be borne by London Transport. This is a straightforward way to optimise the cost to the taxpayer and to the service.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend has answered that point very well. I wish to raise a separate issue that does not necessarily require an immediate answer, but I would like my hon. Friend to consult railway operating businesses about it.

If a train for some reason comes off the track, neither automatic train protection—if it is available—nor other communication systems can immediately tell a train coming in the other direction or on an adjacent track that the line is blocked. Will my hon. Friend consult his technical experts to find out whether there is some way for a driver or guard, if there is one, to advise other trains in the locality, whether underground or overground, that they should stop, even though they cannot see a signal?

Mr. Norris: I shall ask London Transport for an answer to that question. It is in the interest of the system as a whole that we have an effective and instantaneous method of communication on the underground system.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I may be speaking out of turn, but I understand that there is such a system, and that it is extremely simple. Along the side of the tube, two exposed wires run parallel to each other.

If any driver or member of staff wishes to stop traffic on that track, he squeezes the wires together, which creates a circuit, sends a signal and cuts out electricity to all trains on that track. It is simple technology. It does not matter who owns the wires or how they are financed—it will still work.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right, and I especially endorse his point on the ownership of the two wires, but the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham was slightly different. He asked about how the information could be transmitted more widely and how more useful information could be transmitted, rather than merely about switching off the power to trains in the immediate vicinity of the point where the power has been disconnected. I will send a reply on that to my hon. Friend, and copy it to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin).

The second type of PFI project we want to undertake involves ticketing and what we call the "prestige" project. It would involve the complete modernisation of London Transport's ticketing systems, based on the progressive introduction of smart card technology. The contractor would take over responsibility for providing and selling tickets for tube and bus services and for the equipment to validate them, such as the ticket gates at underground stations.

Giving the private sector responsibility for the whole system would itself provide scope for the introduction of innovative and efficient systems. As with the communications project, there may be scope to spread costs if the smart cards can be used with third parties—for instance, as an electronic purse accepted by retailers. It could be used as a means of paying for parking charges or whatever. That is the underlying basis of the need for the Bill in relation to that project.

The third scheme involves power supply. That would involve a contractor taking over LT's existing power generation plant and taking responsibility for the provision of main and emergency power supplies for the underground network. As with the schemes that I have already mentioned, the contractor would be able to spread costs by supplying power for third parties.

Finally, LT is developing plans for extensions of the east London line. Powers are being sought under the Transport and Works Act 1992 for the northern extension to the line, while LT is also considering proposals to extend its southern end. It is intended that they will be taken forward with the private sector under the PFI.

In total, those projects would involve private sector capital investment in LT of about £750 million. Competitions for two of the schemes—for power supplies and for the prestige ticketing project—are under way. London Transport is evaluating pre-qualification bids, and hopes soon to move to the full competition stage. London Transport is also about to invite pre-qualifying bids for the communications project.

In working up those competitions and schemes, LT has run into some potential or actual legal problems in taking them forward within the PFI. As I have said already, LT's powers derive from the London Regional Transport Act 1984, when schemes of that sort were simply not envisaged. The Act, quite rightly, constrains LT's powers to public transport, so as to prevent its becoming, in effect, a Government-sponsored general trading company. However, it has now become clear that the effect of those restrictions is also to circumscribe LT's ability to enter into agreements under the PFI, whereby the private sector party to the agreement would carry out non-transport-related activities.

For example, under its present powers, LT could not enter into agreements of the sort proposed for communications, power or ticketing to the extent that they would involve the private sector partner in the provision of services to third parties to any substantial extent. Nor could LT enter into agreements that might at some stage need to be transferred to a third party: for instance, if the original contractor were to default and the financiers to the deal wished to appoint a new contractor.

Unless addressed, those restrictions will limit the scope for LT to execute successful PFI deals, and will especially reduce the opportunities for pursuing deals involving the use of assets both for LT's own services and for third parties, which promise value for money and the benefit of private sector funding.

The aim of the Bill, which, as I have said, commands the full support of London Transport, is therefore to remove those constraints, and to ensure that LT has the ability to make full use of the PFI. Given the desirability in principle of removing impedances to the PFI, and given that the problems that have been identified would prevent LT from taking forward schemes for which it has competitions under way already, it is clearly important to put the deficiencies right as quickly as possible.

Before I go on to explain the purpose of the Bill in more detail, I should like to emphasise—*[Laughter.]* It is an important measure. I shall emphasise to the House what the Bill does not do.

Mr. Wilson: There must be an hour or two in that.

Mr. Norris: Indeed.

The Bill is not intended to widen the role or functions of LT itself, other than where that is necessary as a by-product of facilitating PFI schemes. As I said before, we are not in the game of setting up LT as a general trading company.

In response to the amendment tabled by Labour Members, I reassure the House that the Bill in no way erodes LT's powers or changes its status. It is not a privatisation Bill; thus, it does not affect the basic duty of LT—as set out in section 2 of the 1984 Act—

"to provide or secure the provision of public passenger transport services for Greater London".

Nor does it affect LT's functions under section 8 of that Act in relation to the planning of fares and services. The Bill does not change the wide range of other provisions in the 1984 Act that would almost certainly need to be changed if the underground were to be privatised.

Of course, we on Conservative Benches believe in the benefits of privatisation, which have proved themselves already in so many transport industries: British Airways, the British Airports Authority, the National Bus Company, the National Freight Consortium and the ports, to give just a few examples. Those benefits are now being extended to the national rail network.

[Mr. Norris]

However, we have no plans to privatise London Underground, and we are not in the business of privatisation by stealth. The Bill is essentially a technical one. It has the strictly limited aim of extending—

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Shame.

Mr. Norris: I hope that my hon. Friend is not suggesting that it is a shame that the Government do not act by stealth. He may be suggesting that the Government have a real enthusiasm for the benefits of privatisation, which I heartily share.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that London's commuters are concerned about the quality of service and the level of investment in the underground? Many of them would welcome privatisation, because, wherever it has taken place, it has led to increased investment and better-quality service. The sooner my hon. Friend gets on his bike and privatises London Underground, the better.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is correct—although I do not wish to inflict the sight of me on my bike upon more Londoners than is absolutely necessary.

Mr. Jenkin: The Minister is seeking a transformation of London Underground, the like of which has been achieved in other nationalised industries only by privatisation and the preparations for it. I wish him well in trying to transform that business, while keeping it in the public sector. However, I fear that customers will expect a complete transformation—particularly when they see the success of rail privatisation and how services have been transformed. *[Laughter.]* We are now hearing hoots of derision from Labour Members—as we did with British Airways, British Telecom, and so on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see that you are looking at me sternly, but I wish to make the point that, unless we actually achieve that kind of transformation in customer service, we must surely look to go to the next stage—to go the whole hog—and shift the business into the private sector, so that we get access not only to private capital but to private sector management techniques. That will lead to the transformation we seek.

Mr. Norris: The issues of private or public ownership and capital are germane to the Bill—they are the very essence of it. I heartily endorse my hon. Friend's observations about the extraordinary success that privatisation has brought to British Airways, for example. He is entirely right to remind hon. Members that, when the privatisation of British Airways was debated in this place, Labour Members constantly decried the proposition, derided it, and said that it would never work in commercial terms.

Labour Members pointed to the fact that no nation in Europe had privatised its national flag airline, and that it was therefore, de facto, impossible. They said that the baby would never fly. That baby is now not only the world's favourite airline but is hugely profitable. Instead of taking money from taxpayers to support its operation, it is making a significant contribution by way of corporation tax.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Although this is interesting, we are debating not British Airways but the London Regional Transport Bill.

Mr. Norris: I accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I have no wish to stray any further down that path, except to point out that, in relation to the involvement of private capital in transport operations, Labour Members have consistently maintained that private capital would not work, and that privatisation would not work—in this respect, they were spectacularly and self-evidently wrong.

I fear that I may have to disappoint my hon. Friend so far as London Transport is concerned. I have made it clear that this is not a plan to privatise London Transport or London Underground. I have said in quite specific terms that the Government are not in the business of privatisation by stealth.

I believe that the observations that my hon. Friend made about the success that will clearly follow from the actions that we have taken in relation to the railways—as success has followed in every other area—will soon become so clear that the cloak of obfuscation, which is all that the Opposition have been able to deliver over the last few years, will become nothing. Customers will see the benefits for themselves on the ground, in services such as the London-Tilbury-Southend service, of which my hon. Friend has some considerable experience.

Mr. Keith Hill *rose—*

Mr. Norris: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is no doubt enthusiastic to point out that he has always been a supporter of privatisation, and that he wishes to endorse it on this occasion.

Mr. Hill: I may do that in due course, if I manage to catch the Chair's eye. In relation to the success of privatisation in public transport, will the Minister identify the success in the deregulation and privatisation of buses in this country? Since 1986, there has been an annual loss of 30 million passengers. Where is the success of privatisation in that?

Mr. Norris: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman very directly: since 1985, costs in the industry have been reduced by one third, public subsidies have more than halved, the proportion of routes run profitably has increased from 65 per cent to 86 per cent., and one third more mileage is being run. In the past year, the decline in bus use—which is attributable to the growth in the use of the private car—has been almost entirely arrested. Bus usage is London has increased.

That significant gain would not have been brought about without the benefit of deregulation and privatisation. However, I note that the hon. Gentleman confused the two—they are very different concepts.

Mr. John Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for his usual courtesy in giving way this afternoon. Does my hon. Friend accept that where London Buses has put routes out to competitive tender, a process that he described earlier in his speech, substantial savings have been made? That shows that London Buses, when owned by the taxpayer, was inefficient, but when routes were put out to competitive tender, working practices improved and the cost to the community went down.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That has been the benefit of the franchising process and of involving private bus companies in the operation of London Buses services. My hon. Friend knows that we have recently sold the operating subsidiaries of London Buses Ltd. into the private sector, many of them, incidentally, purchased by the management, and further efficiency gains and savings to the taxpayer have been brought about thereby, while the quality of the service is manifestly improving.

My hon. Friend also knows that in all the recent surveys by bus user groups, it is the privately operated services that have tended to win the first prize within the capital city. There is absolutely no doubt that we have had some tremendous benefits from the involvement of the private sector.

As I say, the Bill is essentially a technical one. It has the strictly limited aim of extending LT's powers only in so far as that is necessary, first, to remove certain restrictions imposed by the present legislation on LT's ability to enter into agreements for the purposes of the private finance initiative, and, secondly, to deal with the possibility that LT may have to take over the functions of a PFI contractor at the end of a contract.

Clause 1 would extend the scope of section 3 of the 1984 Act by empowering LT, subject to the consent of the Secretary of State, to enter into agreements with contractors which involve the contractor carrying out activities for which LT has no powers. That is needed to provide for schemes such as those related to communications and power, where the value for money of the scheme will be enhanced if the assets being provided by the private sector can be used for commercial activities as well as for purposes directly related to LT's services. Clause 1 also allows LT to enter into agreements with persons such as financiers where that is needed for the purposes of a contract.

Clause 2 makes provision for LT to acquire land, by agreement, for purposes connected with such agreements. That would, for example, as I have said, enable land to be acquired in LT's name for an electricity sub-station not directly required for LT's own purposes, but for use by the contractor in supplying electricity to LUL. I would emphasise that that is not a compulsory purchase power; it is intended to safeguard LT's claim to essential assets at the end of a PFI contract.

The clause also provides that LT may, with the consent of the Secretary of State, carry on the commercial activities of a PFI contractor when the contractor ceases to do so. That power, I emphasise, is intended to be used only as a last resort. It is not the Government's intention that, as and when PFI contracts come to an end, LT should progressively acquire a portfolio of commercial interests.

The expectation is that when PFI contracts expire, the commercial activities associated with them will normally either cease or pass to a new private sector contractor, following a further competition. But we do need to provide for what I trust will be very rare circumstances in which a contract comes to an end prematurely, for instance through default of the contractor. In that situation, LT would clearly want, and would have the powers, to take over immediately those functions connected with the running of its own services. But it would be perverse if services being provided to third parties then had to be terminated.

Thus the aim is that LT would in those exceptional circumstances be able to take over on a caretaker basis the provision of such services, pending the establishment of suitable arrangements to put them back into the private sector. The Secretary of State would expect to give consent to such arrangements only on the basis that LT would do its best to find a private sector party to take over as soon as practicable.

Clause 3 provides the facility for certain of LT's statutory operating powers, not including LT's main functions under the 1984 Act, to be transferable by order to or from another party. The aim of the provisions is to ensure that for schemes involving the provision of some aspect of passenger services involving statutory powers, those powers may be exercisable, for the duration of the contract, by a PFI contractor.

We also want to ensure that the necessary statutory powers can be exercised by LT at the end of a PFI contract. For example, a scheme for the east London line extensions might involve a PFI contractor in providing a train service, for which he would need the relevant operating powers. But again I emphasise that while in such cases a contractor might physically be providing the service, and should have as much commercial freedom as possible to respond to public demand, the service would remain within the overall control of LT under the terms of the 1984 Act.

Finally, clause 4 simply makes consequential amendments to the 1984 Act and to other legislation. Clause 5 is a standard financial provision. It does not mean that we expect the Bill to increase public expenditure. Indeed, by enabling LT to gain the maximum benefit from the private finance initiative, it should reduce LT's need for Government grant. Clause 6 contains the usual provisions in relation to short title, commencement and extent.

Summing up, therefore, the Bill is a limited but important measure which, while not affecting the fundamental role or powers of London Transport, will substantially enhance its capacity to secure maximum benefit from the Government's private finance initiative. LT has been closely involved in the preparation of the Bill and is fully supportive of it.

In particular, the Bill will enable LT to take forward and secure best value from schemes already in progress such as those relating to power supplies, ticketing and communications. In turn, developments such as those, and others in the pipeline, will deliver real benefits to passengers.

On that basis, I commend the Bill to the House.

5.5 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the London Regional Transport Bill because although the House welcomes the higher levels of investment in transport infrastructure provided in the Bill by the development of Private Finance Initiative projects by London Regional Transport, it does not believe that the privatisation of London Underground would be in the interests of London, and fears that this Bill contains powers which will be used to that end."

I suppose that I should first express gratitude to the Government for having managed to fit such a lengthy debate into their heavy business programme. At that point, for the benefit of *Hansard*, I should say: he said ironically. I also congratulate the Minister on a bravura performance.

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

He is put up on occasions such as this because he is one of the few who has the wit to think on his feet. That is meant to be a compliment, incidentally.

I thought that I should equip myself with suitable research, so the House of Commons Library kindly provided John Glover's "London Underground". If things should flag a bit, there is a slightly weightier tome entitled "A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain". If, at about 8 o'clock tonight, things are really desperate, we might need some international perspective and I have here "Underground Railways of the World—Their History and Development" by H. C. P. Havers. However, I am sure that none of that will be necessary because many of my hon. Friends are anxious to contribute to this important debate on a much valued public institution, London Underground.

I make it clear that the Labour party will support any sensible measure which makes it easier for London Underground to get more money into the system for desperately needed investment so long as it is consistent with a public operation of an integrated system. In so far as the Bill advances that objective, we shall facilitate its progress. But the water has been muddied in a most unhelpful manner by the blatherings of the Deputy Prime Minister and lord high everything, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who, only last month, was demanding that a commitment to privatise London Underground should be included in the next Tory manifesto.

It is unfortunate that the right hon. Gentleman is not with us today so that he could pay his debts to London, if to nobody else, by making it clear that his desire to privatise London Underground does not underlie the Bill. In his absence, we can only take the Minister's word for it, which I am happy to do.

But first let us consider what the Deputy Prime Minister has said. I quote from the London *Evening Standard* of 1 February in which we were advised that

"A radical new drive to sell off London Underground to the private sector is being planned by Cabinet Ministers."

It says:

"Michael Heseltine, the deputy prime minister, has told the Transport Secretary Sir George Young that he wants to include 'a commitment' to privatise LU in the party manifesto for the General Election. The plan, one of a number of options being studied by Mr. Heseltine for inclusion in the manifesto, is now being actively considered by the two Ministers."

That may sound like a contradiction in terms.

The London *Evening Standard* continued:

"Exactly how the sell-off . . . would be accomplished is not yet known. But, with expanding and guaranteed passenger numbers . . . LU has long been viewed by some senior Tories as 'ripe' and the next in line for privatisation following British Rail."

None of that is very encouraging for those of us who have followed the progress of British Rail's privatisation. I might say in passing to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) that I would be happy to engage in a general discussion about the merits and beneficial effects or otherwise of privatisation, but the characteristic of the first two privatised rail franchises is that the managers have already said that they will make no new investment in rolling stock during the lifetime of the franchises. I see the hon. Member's brow furrow at that modest challenge to his ideological position. I assure him that that is the position, and I heard from the lips of Mr. Brian Souter of Stagecoach that the franchising system does not allow for investment in new rolling stock. There will be no new rolling stock from South West Trains or from Great Western Trains or, I suspect, from any of the other seven-year franchises, because the system militates against investment in rolling stock.

Mr. Norris *rose—*

Mr. John Marshall *rose—*

Mr. Wilson: I shall give way to the Minister, and I shall give way to the hon. Member for Hendon, South later.

Mr. Norris: I wish to say what I imagine my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) wishes to say. The hon. Gentleman may be right to make that observation, but he will not have heard either of the two contractors say that they are not dedicated to bringing about substantial service improvements. Mr. Brian Souter and those who manage Great Western Trains are quite clear that, even within the seven-year contract period, they can deliver substantial service enhancements which, so far at least, British Rail has failed to deliver.

Mr. Wilson: I do not accept that. In the Great Western Trains and South West Trains areas, British Rail has delivered rather good services. I will let the Minister's comment pass because I do not want to start a general debate about privatisation. But I notice a rapid shift in ground. I picked up the hon. Member for Hendon, South specifically on the subject of investment, because he referred to investment. I thought the Minister might say that there would be no new trains on the underground if it were privatised, but that there will be investment in tracks, tunnels, bridges and the infrastructure. If he had said that, I would have said that, with many fanfares of trumpets, Railtrack has produced a 10-year investment plan that actually envisages less investment than has been provided in the past 10 years. However, I will leave that point for another time.

Mr. John Marshall: I met Mr. Brian Souter of South West Trains at the Confederation of Passenger Transport dinner and I spoke to him about investment and how privatisation was going. He said that when he took over the franchise, he was told that a relatively modest investment would improve the reliability of service. He asked how much it would cost and he told the individuals concerned to go ahead. They said that they had been trying to get the investment for 18 months under British Rail and they had got it in less than 18 days from South West Trains. Mr. Brian Souter has invested in improving the quality of the service, and the hon. Gentleman is wrong to denigrate him as he does.

Mr. Wilson: That sounds like a rather partisan account of the conversation between the hon. Gentleman and Mr. Souter. The hon. Gentleman extolled the virtues of privatising London Underground on the specific ground that it would bring investment in rolling stock. I pointed out, inconveniently for the hon. Gentleman, that the franchisees in rail privatisation have gone on record as saying that they will not invest in rolling stock. Incidentally, *The Independent* today reports that, after the first month's operation of South West Trains and Great Western Trains, there has already been a decline in time

keeping. That will not matter to Conservative Members because they are interested not in time keeping or the effects on passengers, but in the dogma of privatisation.

Ms Glenda Jackson: My hon. Friend will be aware that a Conservative think tank—in 1994, I believe—floated the idea of the privatisation of London Underground. The improvement in services for Londoners contained in that document was a reduction in the network of almost two thirds. The document also suggested that one way to raise the necessary funding for investment would be to offer for sale the names of existing London Underground stations. For example, it was suggested that perhaps Harrods would like to bid to change the name of Knightsbridge station to Harrods. Although the Minister has argued fairly forcefully that the Government are not attempting to privatise London Underground, the idea has been floating around in the Conservative party for some years.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend is right. I always think that "Conservative think tank" is a contradiction in terms, but her general point is perfectly accurate.

I accept the spirit of the Minister's assurances today, but I must point out that he is an old lag. He has made comments on the subject before that were not in line with what he has said today. The *Evening Standard* article, to which I referred earlier, states:

"Just over two years ago Steven Norris, London's minister for transport, in an interview with the Evening Standard, described franchises"—

in the context of London Underground—

"as 'just pure common sense.' At the time Mr. Norris said: 'Franchises could be offered on line-by-line basis. That is a concept we have clearly got to examine.'"

One does not have to be paranoid—having read those quotations, considered the history and, indeed, listened to the comments from Tory Members this afternoon—to suspect that even in this apparently innocuous or constructive Bill all might not be quite as it seems. The not very cleverly hidden agenda is the privatisation of London Underground.

I would have thought that by now even the tiny band of zealots assembled on the Tory Benches this afternoon might show some restraint in so uncritically singing the praises of the railway franchising concept, because it is certainly not proving very popular in public opinion. The Minister is on the record as supporting the principle of franchising London Underground services and privatising the whole system. Even more importantly—if that is possible—the Deputy Prime Minister has come straight out and said that he wants to see the privatisation of London Underground in the next Tory manifesto. The gaggle of Tory Members of Parliament from whom we have heard today are all clearly committed to the privatisation of London Underground. So we are entitled to inspect the Bill closely and we will do that this afternoon and again in Committee.

I might as well lay down a marker. We will resist and we will prevent the privatisation of London Underground this side of a general election. The Minister, voluntarily, will not be in the House thereafter, but the people who want to privatise everything that provides a worthwhile public service in this society will not be in government to fulfil those ambitions.

I do not want to get into a general argument about privatisation, but I despise the way in which public service is denigrated in the House. The Tories can make some claims on behalf of some privatisations. They can point to British Airways as a success story and to the success of British Telecom, although it would have been successful anyway and it probably would not have shed so many jobs in the process. But the idea, which Conservative Members propagate, that everything in the public sector was a failure and a burden on the taxpayer is so mendacious as to require correction. For example, British Airways is now a profitable and successful airline, but when it was in the public sector it was also profitable. The electricity industry has never paid as much to the Exchequer in tax as it did prior to privatisation in profits. In the gas industry, the price of domestic gas has not yet returned to 1979 levels in spite of the fact that we are now self-sufficient in gas. In all these industries, the public sector did a good job for the country. It would behove Tory Members to recognise that, instead of getting caught up in their ideological obsession with denigrating everything in the public sector.

Mr. Norris: In 1979, the nationalised industries consumed just over £2 billion in public support; in 1994, they cumulatively paid more than £2.5 billion in corporation tax to the taxpayer. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that unarguable proposition?

Secondly, whatever the hon. Gentleman's view of the merits of British Airways, and of whether it would have made a profit if allowed to continue in the public sector, it was his colleagues who claimed that that privatisation would be a disaster. It has palpably not been a disaster, which is why we would claim the same success for the railways and other privatisations. That, surely, is the hon. Gentleman's real logical difficulty.

Mr. Wilson: If we were going to debate this in more detail, I would accept some of what the Minister says about British Airways. But I do not accept his more general point. What he says about what the public industries cost and now produce is straight out of the Conservative central office crib sheet. In fact, there were two heavy loss makers in the public sector: the coal and steel industries—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have allowed hon. Members to stray rather wide with their examples, but now we should get back to the Bill.

Mr. Wilson: The public utilities used to put more money into the Treasury than they do now—that fact should not be forgotten. The analogy between British Airways and the railways, or London Underground, is false. British Airways was a profitable transport business. In this country as in every other, however, the railways require public subsidy. So the question of the railways is qualitatively different from any question attaching to previous privatisations. The only question is whether the public subsidies provided anyway by the taxpayer, in the private or public sector, are better spent on developing the industry and maximising the quality of public service or on funding the private profits of the operators.

Mr. Keith Hill: Is my hon. Friend aware of the findings of the Transport Select Committee, of which I am a member, that the consequences of the franchising system for the British taxpayer are an annual extra cost of £600 million? Does he agree that there is every reason to

[Mr. Keith Hill]

believe that if London Underground were privatised, the burden on the taxpayer to sustain that privatisation would be similarly increased?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend is of course right. The all-party Select Committee under the—not exactly Trotskyite—chairmanship of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) reached the unanimous conclusion that privatisation would cost the taxpayer £600 million a year more for no extra services. If the Tories think that is good value for money, theirs can hardly claim to be the party of business.

Mr. Garnier: Can the hon. Gentleman spare us a few minutes to explain how he reconciles the two halves of his amendment? His party

"welcomes the higher levels of investment"

provided by the PFI, yet does not believe

"that the privatisation of London Underground would be in the interests of London".

Can he explain the apparent inconsistency?

Mr. Wilson: We have heard a great deal about this brilliant lawyer who presumably collects large sums of money outside the Chamber for that quality of intervention. I am surprised to have to point out to him that the PFI, even under the Tories, is not synonymous with privatisation. There is no contradiction between a joint funding approach and public control—the public operation of a public asset.

Mr. Garnier: So the hon. Gentleman has no problem with this Bill?

Mr. Wilson: Do people pay the hon. and learned Gentleman for this kind of intervention? Does he win any cases? I do not understand his difficulty. Even the Minister was generous enough to point out that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) realised that there are ways of getting private money into public projects so as to facilitate the public sector's operation and provide the private sector with returns. [HON. MEMBERS: "The right hon. Gentleman is a great man."] Indeed he is, as even the Minister, who appears to be demob happy, would agree. Such partnerships also create employment and accelerate the pace of investment in public projects. They are therefore wholly desirable.

Ever since I have taken an interest in these matters, Ministers—notably the right hon. Members for Henley and for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), now known as the right hon. Member for Hill Samuel MacGregor—have stood at the Dispatch Box and said that it is impossible to get private money into public projects. They said that that was a naive approach to circumventing public spending rules. They said that it could not be done; a project had to be wholly private or wholly public. That was the Government's approach until recently. They are latecomers to the idea of public-private partnerships.

The problem is that, once converted, the Tories cannot get off the ideological hook. They cannot allow the public sector to remain in the driving seat. All the experience of the PFI so far shows that public-private partnerships happen only when the ultimate commitment to the project remains in the public sector. Without that, the private sector will not accept the risk entailed in most of these projects. That is why I genuinely believe that there will be a great many of these projects under a Labour Government. We will not be hung up on insisting that an unreasonable degree of risk must be passed to the private sector. We will go for pragmatic arrangements that allow the private sector to do what it is good at and the public sector to do what it is good at. London Underground will benefit from that.

Mr. Stephen: Would we be mistaken if we concluded that the hon. Gentleman and his party have an ideological objection to privatisation?

Mr. Wilson: We have no such objection in principle. I have no wish to buy back the Carlisle pubs for British Rail. Over the years some things have passed into the public sector that should not be there and which can be better done in the private sector. But our residual antipathy, such as it is, to the idea that the private sector can do everything better than the public sector is as nothing compared with the hatred that Tory Members display towards the public sector, and compared with their obsessive, irrational and unsubstantiated belief that there is nothing that the public sector can do better on behalf of the taxpayer.

I say that the public sector can do some things better and more efficiently, in the social, environmental and economic interests of the wider community.

Mr. Norris: I support the hon. Gentleman's remarks, in that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), the former Secretary of State, used to make that very point to the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) when he was Labour's transport spokesman. The one thing that the Government do better than the private sector is to borrow money at finer rates. The right hon. Gentleman continually proposed leasing, a concept that he identified to accelerate public investment. But the only consequence was to impose far greater costs on the Exchequer than it would have borne if the Government had invested the funds in the first place.

The hon. Gentleman has neglected to identify how the PFI works: the transfer of risk from the public to the private sector, together with the responsibility for operations, forces greater efficiencies and greater economies. That is not because the people involved are inherently superior—I readily concede that point to the hon. Gentleman—but simply because they have more financial muscle available to them.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister is more reasonable than some of his colleagues in that he enters the latter caveat. There are no absolutes in this. Of course, risk should be transferred to the private sector, but it is a matter of degree.

I return to London Underground and the Northern line project, which is in the process of going ahead under the PFI. ABB, the company that was to the fore in advocating the project and carrying it forward, and, ultimately, I argue, making it happen, eventually pulled out because of the degree of risk that the Government wished to

transfer to it. I recall that the value of residual assets was the stumbling point. As a result 700 people are unemployed. It also happened for GEC Alsthom, and the managing director left shortly afterwards. It will be interesting to know what the highest echelons of GEC Alsthom think about the level of risk that it has accepted on the Northern line project. It will be even more interesting to know whether the Government will get away with it a second time, as it is fairly well known in the industry that nobody else would have accepted the level of risk that was passed on to make the Northern line project happen. I note that the Minister does not deny that.

We are talking here about a matter of balance. We want the projects to happen. We are happy to facilitate a measure that will make them happen, but we do not want any form of back-door privatisation. Ministers cannot complain if we thoroughly test every word that they say on this subject, because the precedents and their public utterances on the subject have been very much in the direction of all-out privatisation.

I could continue with further cuttings that show that what the Government really have in mind for London Underground is privatisation. After I had got through the first few cuttings about the privatisation of London Underground, which I got from the Library today, I noticed that one was written by the crime correspondent of the London *Evening Standard*. I immediately thought that we were on to the LTS contract, but we shall pass on that. The Bill should include a clause, perhaps, that the public sector should not be defrauded by the private sector, but that is not Tory philosophy either.

Mr. Spearing: Before my hon. Friend leaves privatisation entirely, does he agree that although the Minister said that it was not his intention to let Wisconsin Central or its equivalent play a big part in the Central line in future—other Ministers may well allow it—the Bill permits large-scale contractorisation, which is not very different from privatisation, which we would not accept, because it would not be in the interests of a coherent London Transport railway system, which was created in the 1930s but is now in the process of being dismantled?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We do not want the fragmentation of the London underground system any more than we wanted the fragmentation of the British railway system, which is now happening with such deleterious consequences.

I am told that all-out privatisation could take place under existing legislation and that the Bill will not make it technically more possible for privatisation to occur, and to some extent we have to be guided by what we are told in these matters. What is important, however, is the credibility of the assurances. That is what we are anxious to test tonight. I cannot find the notes on clauses, so I shall have to paraphrase. The Secretary of State says that there are no manpower implications in the Bill, but then linked to that the statement that manpower employed by London Underground Ltd. will decline as contractorisation increases. That is not exactly encouraging if that is the motivation that underlies the Bill.

Mr. Norris: This is an important point. The hon. Gentleman was generous enough to say that he did not have the notes on clauses in front of him, so I shall correct a misapprehension that I know that he would not wish to leave the House with. The explanatory and financial memorandum says specifically:

"The Bill will have no direct effect on public sector manpower, although the number of LRT employees will decline to the extent that more staff are transferred to contractors under Private Finance Initiative agreements."

That simply acknowledges that the number employed by LRT directly falls as those staff are transferred to PFI contractors. It is not in any respect a statement about numbers of staff overall.

Mr. Wilson: It is useful that the Minister put that on record. I put it on the record that we would prefer to see a directly employed work force under London Underground Ltd. with all the securities and conditions of service that that involves. In getting private money into these projects, there is no need to transfer the employees to separately established private companies. There is no necessary corollary between those two actions. I hope that the Minister recognises that.

Returning briefly to the provision of ticketing at Heathrow, I defer to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who was good enough to point out to me that, 20 years ago, the Greater London council tried to get ticketing right at Heathrow. He suspects that it might have been more successful if the GLC were still operating it rather than the present quango. We all have a shared interest. I endorse what the Minister said and welcome his remarks that, as the entry point to this country, the provision of ticketing at Heathrow is a disgrace and that something should be done about it.

I have spoken for long enough—*[Interruption.]*—if that is possible. I could not help but think when I was doing my research that there used to be more interesting debates in the House. I noticed that, in 1862, means of traction were debated, and John Fowler, the engineer, was said to have envisaged that trains would be blown through an airtight tunnel, using giant compressors at each terminus. If we had that quality of debate now instead of mere political rhetoric, the nation would probably be better informed and better governed.

We have put down our markers. The tube and safety on it is of immense importance. If people did not realise before just what high risks are involved in running an underground system, the tragedy of King's Cross reminded them that it is not something with which to play politics. It is an immensely complex system that needs a high level of investment and maintenance. In so far as the Bill facilitates those ends, we will support it, but it is essential to point out that we do not want the same games to be played with London Underground in terms of fragmentation, franchising and privatisation that have taken place with British Rail.

5.38 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I am grateful to be called early in the debate. I consider it a pleasure to follow the Front-Bench spokesmen. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who speaks for the Opposition, was courteous enough to tell me that he has to go to a meeting shortly. I shall not take that amiss. I enjoyed his speech very much. I did not agree with much of it, but he made his points in a balanced and, at times, amusing way.

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

I very much enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister. I do not know whether he realises it, but he spoke for one hour and 21 minutes. It seemed—this is the greatest tribute that can be paid to anybody who speaks at length in the Chamber—to be only half an hour long. It probably was if the interventions are discounted. I shall not say that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North spoke for only half an hour but that it seemed like twice that length, as that was not the case. I cannot match the eloquence of either, but I shall try to be a little more brief.

The Bill is essentially technical, conferring very limited powers. It is basically intended to encourage and increase capital investment in London Transport in general and London Underground in particular. I consider it right for London Transport's limited powers to be increased in the restricted sense in which the Bill increases them.

The Bill is also about private finance initiatives. My hon. Friend the Minister identified one of those initiatives, which is already—so to speak—in train: the Heathrow link. The British Airports Authority is to contribute £300 million in a partnership between the public and the private sector. I welcome that; I also welcome—this is nearer to my parochial home—the £400 million that is being invested in new rolling stock on the Northern line. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have encouraged that investment, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and the hon. Members for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), for Streatham (Mr. Hill), for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra), all of whom are in their places.

I am not sure whether I understood my hon. Friend the Minister correctly, but he gave the impression that the new rolling stock—which I prefer to call trains; the stock on the Northern line is certainly rolling at present—would not start to be introduced until the middle of next year. I was rather disappointed by that: I had hoped that the first trains would be introduced at the end of this year. Perhaps my hon. Friend will be able to reassure the House, later if not now. Certainly, we welcome the 100 or more trains that will come on to our local Northern line.

In addition to the private finance initiatives that have already been announced and are about to be implemented, my hon. Friend mentioned a further £750 million that will enable London Transport to invest in three further specific projects. First, it plans improvements to the communications system, which I gather involves an integrated radio network. I must confess that, as a product of the pre-computer age, I do not really understand these matters, but such a system is certainly needed.

Secondly, London Transport also proposes to improve the ticketing system, and that too is necessary. Hon. Members have mentioned arriving at Heathrow. I take the Northern line, rather than fly to Heathrow, to get to Westminster. I use the underground regularly. I have used it even more since I ceased to be a Minister. There are two types of automated ticket dispenser: there is the type that demands the exact price of the ticket, and the type that gives change. I have observed that, although there is rarely a queue at those machines, there is always a queue at the window and that it consists of people who do not have any change and, no doubt, a few who do not know how to use the automated machines. I do not believe that the replacement of automated machines by any number of people would speed up the dispensing of tickets. I say that not for ideological reasons, but on the basis of observation at the sharp end.

Thirdly, there is a private finance initiative project to improve the power supply throughout the underground. It is entirely reasonable that the Bill should contain approval for electricity sub-stations in private ownership to be built on LT land. I see nothing wrong with that.

Let me make one of the few party political points that I shall make. I feel that it needs to be made. I welcome the Bill because it will encourage more private finance initiatives. I also welcome Labour's support for some of the projects that are already under way. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate and I debated the matter on television a few months ago, when I re-entered that medium after six and a half years observing a vow of silence in the Government Whips Office. I believe that the private finance initiative is accepted on both sides of the House; that is certainly the message that I received from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North.

We all look up suitable quotations not only from what we have said ourselves, but from what our political opponents have said. Let me draw Opposition Members' attention to what was said only six months ago by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who I understand is one of the Labour party's economic spokesmen:

> "Alongside our corporate tax strategy is our widescale commitment to nurturing partnership between the public and private sector, particularly with regard to partnerships in infrastructure investment, putting old battles between public and private behind us."

That, I think, reflects the general view of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Norris: Was it not also the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith)—who succeeded me in the second greatest constituency in England—who said that no alternative to the present Government could conceivably contemplate higher levels of public expenditure than those in which the Government were currently indulging? Does not that show very forcefully why the Bill is essential and, moreover, that Opposition Members could not possibly disagree with it?

Sir Sydney Chapman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Let me add that I hope that rumours that he will not be standing at the next election are without basis. Not only would that be a dreadful loss to the parliamentary Conservative party; the quality of debates in the House would take a tumble. I am sure that at least some Opposition Members share that sentiment. I can say very sincerely of my hon. Friend that he has a rare ability to speak at the Dispatch Box with authority and assurance while displaying no sign of arrogance. He also manages to speak confidently without showing any complacency. I pay due tribute to him.

The Bill is directly related to London Transport, mainly London Underground. It is therefore directly related to the Northern line. I should like to make a few comments about what my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South described eight years ago as an abominable system. The Northern line is indeed the misery line in the London Underground network, not only because it needs a good deal of investment but because it really consists of two separate lines.

Anyone who has studied the configuration of the line will know that one section goes from High Barnet in the north, via the City, to Waterloo and southwards, while the other section starts at Edgware, goes into the other spur at Camden Town and then proceeds southwards, via the west end and Waterloo. The line is rather like a chain, in that its strongest point is its weakest link—Camden Town, where the track is not sufficient to deal with the demand for services, especially during the rush hour.

I am told that, if the two parts of the line were separated, between 20 and 30 per cent. more traffic could use it. I suspect, however, that if they were separated—which I understand would cost billions of pounds—my constituents would complain when they wanted to go to the west end, just as the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South would complain that they could not go directly to the City.

The Northern line is unique. For a considerable amount of its length—from, I think, East Finchley to Morden—it contains the longest tunnel in the world. Although that might be the proud boast of people who espouse the Northern line's cause, it results in its being probably the most unpopular line for employees in the London Transport network. I suggest that staff who work on the Northern line should be paid a premium, to try to ensure that more employees will agree to work on it. Although there may not be a shortage of employees on the London Underground system as a whole, there inevitably is a shortage on the Northern line.

I shall not bore the House by reminding it of some of the investment figures that I managed to glean from my hon. Friend the Minister in an intervention, but the problem facing London Underground has been caused by chronic underinvestment in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It is hard for us to realise it but, until the late 1970s, planning for London Transport assumed that, each year, fewer people would use the system or, to be more precise, people would use the system on fewer occasions. That was partly to do with the great growth, during those three decades, of car ownership.

Suddenly, towards the end of the 1970s—when Labour and Conservative Governments were in power—it was realised that the chronic underinvestment had to be dealt with. In the 1970s, capital investment in London Underground averaged under £50 million a year. Between the end of 1979 and the beginning of the 1990s, it increased to more than £500 million a year. That does not include an additional £500 million of annual investment in the Jubilee line extension at present.

Mr. Keith Hill: I am deeply reluctant to labour a point that I have already made but, until the late 1960s, London Transport was under a statutory break-even requirement and, as the hon. Gentleman has conceded, its demand for central Government funding did not emerge until the late 1970s. It is bogus to draw comparisons between funding in the 1970s and in the current period as, in the 1970s, London Transport did not demand the same level of central Government subvention. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is far more relevant to examine the decline in core investment in London Underground from £683 million in 1992-93 to—this is a revised estimate—some £380 million in 1997-98. That is a scandal and he must justify it.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I do not try to justify it because it is nowhere near the reality. I understand what the hon. Gentleman says, but even if he were correct—which he is in technical terms—the vast increase in investment far outweighs those esoteric considerations. We could debate this all night, but most certainly will not.

In saying that investment has risen from under £50 million a year in the 1970s to more than £500 million a year in the 1990s, I exclude inflation. Allowing for inflation, but still excluding investment in the Jubilee line extension, a real comparison of those figures shows that we have quadrupled investment, but that is, perhaps, more an argument for the Committee stage of the Bill. I hesitate to say that only because I should like to assure the Government Whip on the Front Bench that that is not an invitation for me to be invited to join the Committee.

I am grateful for the House's indulgence. More and more investment is needed on the London Underground system. After the Government reached investment of £500 million a year, London Underground managers demanded that it should be £750 million a year. We would all like to wave our proverbial wands and to give more to London Underground.

That brings me back to the central point of the debate and of why we need the Bill. The taxpayer will, I hope—we cannot be certain about the future—put more and more into London Underground, year on year. Given the other priorities of public spending—pensioners at my constituency meetings do not put investment in London Underground ahead of the need to increase the state retirement pension—the only way that we can find the finance to secure the necessary investment in London Underground in the next decade is the private finance initiative. That is why I welcome the Bill.

The Bill is short. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, it has six clauses but, essentially, it has just three. It is technical but important and I commend it to the House.

5.56 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): Despite the Minister's protests of injured innocence, my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) was clearly right to subject the Bill to his usual scathing analysis as it is a possible paving measure towards privatisation of London Underground.

Bitter experience has taught Labour Members that the Government are not always entirely transparent in their intentions on matters of privatisation. Like my hon. Friend, and also my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), I spent many weeks on the Standing Committee that considered the Railways Bill in 1993. During that long consideration, did Ministers mention their intention to privatise Railtrack before the completion of the franchising process on British Rail? Did they mention even Railtrack's flotation?

It is not without reason, therefore, that we are suspicious of the Government's intentions—all the more so in this case. After all, there has hardly been an absence of smoke about the Government's preference for privatisation of the tube system. My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North referred to the story in early February in *The Independent* headlined:

"Tory plan to sell off tube".

According to *The Independent*, that is one of the pet projects of the indefatigable First Secretary of State and viceroy of Henley—that is about the only title that he has

[Mr. Keith Hill]

not yet assumed, and I hope that I have not planted the idea in his mind—for inclusion in the next Tory party manifesto.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend the First Secretary of State will be reading the record of these proceedings.

Mr. Hill: Exactly—no doubt he will read the record assiduously on the morrow and we shall receive an announcement in due course.

The interesting thing about that story was that it was not ascribed just to the First Secretary of State. *The Independent* was able to find a number of London Conservative Members who were ready to justify the scheme, so it is hardly news to them. There is, as they say, no smoke without fire. Judging from Tory Members' interventions, the privateers are snapping at the Minister's heels, despite his disavowals. Frankly, as a London Labour Member of Parliament I am almost tempted to welcome any proposal for privatising the tube. After the chaos of rail privatisation, for the majority of Londoners the privatisation of the tube would be the final nail in the Government's coffin.

If the Minister and the Government mean what they say about the Bill having nothing to do with privatisation, they will not vote against Labour's reasoned amendment. If they do vote against it, Londoners will draw the obvious conclusion, which is that a sell-off of the tube is in the Government's sights. I just hope that Ministers are braced for the consequences.

Mr. Wilson: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is an exact parallel with rail privatisation? While Londoners, including my hon. Friend's constituents, are wholly opposed to any privatisation of the tube, they would be even more appalled by its possible fragmentation.

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is right. The frightening thing is that the Tory think tank's favourite scheme is to sell all 10 London tube lines. It is a recipe for chaos and disaster for London's travelling public. When Londoners learn that Conservative Back Benchers, at least, are contemplating fragmentation of the tube, they will be even more pronounced in their reaction to the Bill.

I shall adopt a more charitable note and take the Minister at his stated intentions. If the Bill is simply devised in part, as the Minister has assured us, to permit London Underground to diversify its profit-making activities—for example, the fibre-optic cable scheme—I, for one, certainly have no objection. On the contrary, I am all for public sector companies engaging in profitable innovation. Many of the former nationalised utilities did so very successfully, which is why the Government were able to privatise them in due course. That sort of profit-making innovation is an entirely proper activity for a public sector company in a mixed economy. It is exactly the sort of freedom that the Labour party wants for the Post Office, but which the Government are consistently resisting.

If, in addition and as the Minister declared, the Bill is designed to facilitate London Regional Transport's participation in further private finance initiatives, I am all for that, too. We welcomed the initial embrace of the private finance initiative concept in 1991 by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), in his previous incarnation, and the subsequent, even warmer, embrace of the concept by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Of course, Labour Members know that the true origins of the concept lie not in Kingston upon Thames but with my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). It is exactly the right sort of public-private partnership that we should be aiming for in British industry at the end of the 20th century.

It is also indisputably the case that the PFI has hardly been a roaring success under the Government, with only one fifth of authorised expenditure having been expended on schemes to date. That is why I have been impressed by the detailed thinking undertaken by the Labour Treasury team on this. I have read all the documents carefully. As the Member of Parliament who acted as secretary to the all-party Northern line group during the lengthy and tortuous negotiations on the Northern line PFI—which ultimately succeeded, much to the advantage of my constituents in Clapham and Balham—I appreciate Labour's new proposals on the PFI concept. For example, I appreciate the objectives of securing greater prioritisation among the PFIs, of achieving greater clarity in the terms on which the private sector should be required to submit tenders and how risk and returns are to be shared and, not least, of streamlining the decision-making process. I am also interested in Labour's newer thinking about mechanisms to insure private and public sectors against the risks involved in such projects.

The PFI offers the leverage of private sector borrowing because of the efficiency gains from private sector management of the projects, but it is important to recognise that it does not actually secure significant extra funding. PFIs can bring forward projects, but at the end of the day they still have to be paid for out of public funds—either out of enhanced revenues, as is anticipated with the Northern line PFI, or directly from the Exchequer. Nevertheless, where PFIs are possible, they are very much to be encouraged. The Bill is designed to facilitate PFIs associated with power supply on the underground and with a new ticketing system. I hope that there remains scope for further PFIs more directly concerned with infrastructure on the underground—rolling stock, track and signalling renewals and, perhaps, station development.

As the Minister has already said, PFIs will succeed only where there is a real profit incentive for the private sector. The truth is that much, if not most of the renewals still desperately needed on the underground relate to intrinsically loss-making infrastructure and services. It is obvious that investment in such areas should be the subject of direct Government expenditure; yet the blunt truth is that the Government have proved reluctant to fund more than, at most, 60 or 70 per cent. of the capital investment that London Underground has identified as necessary to create, in its words, "a decently modern metro".

That level of investment was set at £700 million by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1991. Although I have seen subsequent disavowals that the Government ever accepted that figure as the correct level, the very fact that in 1991, the year of the report, the then Secretary of State for Transport convinced the Chancellor to increase investment to that precise level is persuasive enough proof that the Government knew that it was the right level.

The trouble was that that munificence extended for just 12 months. Having geared up to spend £683 million at 1995-96 prices on the core network in 1992-93, London Underground found its capital investment slashed by £150 million the following year. Since then, there has been a see-sawing in capital investment in the core network from one "Financial Statement" to the next—but, on the whole, there has been a distinct downward trend. There was £550 million for the core network in 1993-94, £546 million in 1994-95 and £549 million in 1995-96. Last year London Underground requested £581 million for 1996-97, but got £413 million. For the following two years to 1999, the equivalent projected sums are £383 million for each year.

Mr. Norris: Did the hon. Gentleman refer to grant or did he refer to investment? If he is referring to grant, he must acknowledge that to any grant provided must be added the very substantial internally generated investment by London Transport to give a total figure for what actually matters, which is investment in service. He will acknowledge that investment in the service is at a consistent all-time high.

Mr. Hill: I certainly accept that point, but I do not think that there is any point in having a partisan dispute. The Minister is absolutely right about the global figure for investment in the core network and the Jubilee line extension, about which I shall comment in a moment, and it would be foolish to challenge that assertion. It seems highly unsatisfactory, however, that the admirable efforts of London Transport to generate its own funding, which is running at £200 million a year, should be responsible for almost 40 per cent. of its capital investment funding. I doubt whether any public transport system in any major capital city in the western world has such a requirement for self-generated capital funding placed on it.

Mr. Garnier: So that I may understand the hon. Gentleman's point, can he say what level of direct grant he would propose if he were the Minister responsible for London Underground?

Mr. Hill: I will gladly do that. The hon. and learned Gentleman is anticipating my argument; if he will bear with me, I will come to his point.

Mr. Stephen: If a business has the ability to generate a substantial proportion of its own funds for investment, is there any reason in principle why it should not do so?

Mr. Hill: Absolutely not, but the essence of my argument is that there should not be such a heavy burden placed on self-generated funding in the overall capital programme. We ought to be innovative in our approach to possible funding for transport infrastructure programmes. Self-generated funding is one source. Central Government funding is another. Perhaps we should also be considering other sources, about which I shall comment. In principle, of course there is no objection to internally generated funds forming part of the capital programme.

I should like to make two points about the record of investment in London Underground over the past few years. First, the investment is inconsistent, and that is no way to run a railway. It is grossly unfair on policy makers in London Underground, who cannot construct reliable future investment programmes against a backdrop of the see-sawing profile of central Government grant. It creates a demoralising climate of uncertainty in the company—hopes are raised for the implementation of projects and then subsequently dashed. Such uncertainty also creates its own dis-economies. Time and resources invested in developing projects are wasted when funding ceases abruptly. I am not recommending it, but it would have almost been better for planners at London Transport to have been guaranteed stability at a lower level than to suffer the slings and arrows of such inconstant fortune at the Government's hands.

Secondly, funding for the core network will approximately halve between 1993 and 1998. The original figure suggested by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission of £750 million at current prices was a realistic assessment of what is needed to develop a modestly improving metro system for our capital city. The Government and their successors ought to recognise their responsibility in that respect. I hope that that satisfies the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). We are talking not about megabucks in this context but about making the difference between an underground system that is set on a process of slow decline and one which, in an unspectacular fashion, can continue to meet the needs of London as a working economy and a centre of tourism.

I should anticipate a further intervention by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough by hastily adding that, as a mere Back Bencher, someone of my humble status cannot possibly be construed as offering a spending pledge on behalf of Labour in the lead-up to the next election. I am talking as much to my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North as I am to the Government, who apparently have neither the will nor the time to make the necessary change, since they are so obviously on their way out, when I say that London nowadays is short-changed in the relationship between its contribution to the national economy and its share in investment in the Exchequer. It generates one fifth of the nation's wealth and gets back one seventh in Exchequer expenditure.

Of course, I accept the principle of redistribution—I do not suppose that I would be sitting on the Opposition Benches if I did not. There are great riches in London, but it also has the greatest reservoir of unemployed persons in the country. Half of the top 25 parliamentary constituencies with the highest level of unemployment are in London—one of them is mine. It is my firm belief that a new balance must be struck to correct the present distortion in the distribution of national wealth. Higher investment in London's transport infrastructure would be one means of doing that. I repeat my belief that such higher investment ought to be forthcoming from the Government and I express my hope that it will be from the next Labour Government.

In any circumstances, either as an alternative or, it is to be hoped, as a supplement to higher Government funding—to address the point to which I referred in response to the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen)—we ought to be ready to consider other sources of financing the London transport infrastructure, including the London underground.

For many years, a company levy has helped to develop Paris's massively impressive overground and underground railway system. Remarkably, that is exactly what is on offer from London's businesses as well. Almost six years ago,

[Mr. Hill]

in May 1990, the Corporation of London published its far-sighted report on London's transport, "A Plan to Protect the Future". That report contained a proposal for a supplement to the then unified business rate, to be earmarked for transport improvements in London.

The same plan has been taken up by the excellent London First group as part of its transport initiative. Its essential proposal is to invite businesses to vote on whether to contribute to a specific programme of investment in existing and new railway lines—overground and underground—in London. If that were agreed, the contribution would be collected through a surcharge on the national non-domestic rate. The potential of the scheme is obvious. A 10 per cent. addition to the NNDR would yield in London between £300 million and £400 million a year—more than enough to fill the gap between Exchequer funding and the needs of the core underground network.

I regret that Ministers have shilly-shallied about the proposal—I suppose that we can hope for no more—which I repeat has been on offer from London's businesses for almost six years. Ministers have raised concerns about expenditure being counted against the public sector borrowing requirement. As London First has pointed out, routes around the PSBR concept were devised for the community charge, for council tax and for grant-maintained schools, and a route ought also to be found to secure such a remarkable offer.

Mr. Stephen: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting proposition. Does he accept that although most businesses do not mind paying tax on money that they have earned, they object to paying tax on money that they have not earned? The problem with non-domestic rates, as with national insurance contributions, is that they do not relate to a business's ability to pay.

Mr. Hill: That may or may not be the case. Let us suck it and see, test it out, put it on trial and ask businesses, as their representative organisation in London is inviting us to do.

Mr. Norris: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) for giving way, because I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) is making an extremely important point. I must tell the hon. Member for Streatham that government is about slightly more than sucking it and seeing, inviting though that prospect may be. [*Interruption.*] I do not see what the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) finds so risible.

If the hon. Member for Streatham suggests the notion of additional taxation for London's hard-pressed business community, and if he accepts the undeniable fact asserted by my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham—that the national non-domestic rate takes no account of the profitability of an individual enterprise or of its ability to pay—precisely what has the hon. Member for Streatham sucked and seen that the rest of us do not know about? Will he enlighten us? Will he get away from all the hyperbole and vague arm wavings and give us some details of his scheme for a tax on London's businesses? For example, does he think that the small shopkeepers of Streatham would be happy to pay a tax to deliver crossrail? I should be interested if he can give us an answer.

Mr. Hill: Recoiling from that devastating intervention, I must point out that it is not for me to suck it and see in that context. Notwithstanding the Minister's many claims to esteem in the House—many of us have already said that we regard him as an ornament to the Chamber—he will surely accept that both the Corporation of London, which produced a report on London's transport entitled, "A Plan to Protect the Future", and the London Pride Partnership, the representative organisation which incorporates businesses across the capital and is doing a wonderful job promoting London, have published reports in which they make precisely the proposal that I have described. Both those organisations say that the test should be to put the proposition to the businesses themselves. As representative organisations, they obviously have a strong suspicion that London businesses would say yes, because they want to put London first. London First is surely right to observe that if businesses are willing to contribute to transport investment, it would be

"bizarre to veto a scheme which enables them to do so in an equitable way".

I earnestly hope that both the Government and my party will revisit that proposal, which has been on offer so long. It is a gift horse that it would be mad to kick in the teeth. That investment is desperately needed.

Mr. Garnier: Reverting to the hon. Gentleman's point about a London transport business tax, did he say what percentage the tax would be of a company's profits or turnover? If he did I missed it. Did he say which authority would levy the tax—a London Transport body, a local government body or central Government? What would be the consequences of the appeals system that would have to be set up to deal with any applications against any unfair levy of taxation that may be made by the body that he hopes to invent? Finally, what total sum does the hon. Gentleman hope that his new tax will raise? Would it be different from the £750 million that he mentioned earlier?

Mr. Hill: Those questions would be better put to the Corporation of London or to London First, because they devised the scheme.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman is arguing in favour of the proposal.

Mr. Hill: I will give the hon. and learned Gentleman an example. It is estimated that a 10 per cent. supplement to the national non-domestic rate for London businesses would yield between £300 million and £400 million. I cannot dispute that figure as it appears in a document entitled, "Liberate the Tube", published by the Centre for Policy Studies, so it would appear to have the stamp of approval of one of the hon. and learned Gentleman's Conservative party think tanks. He might have a word with the CPS about the idea; I dare say that he is closer to it than I am.

Mr. Garnier: I would not mind asking—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) giving way?

Mr. Hill: No. I have answered the hon. and learned Member perfectly adequately.

It is perfectly true, as the Minister has repeatedly told us, that capital investment in London is at an all-time high. However, almost half that capital expenditure is devoted

solely to the Jubilee line extension. I do not complain about the Jubilee line extension; I am all for new lines. In fact it would suit me if the Minister would here and now give the immediate go-ahead for an extension of the tube to Streatham. That was first promised in 1926, but we are still waiting for it 70 years on. What a wonderful millennium gift that would be for the people of Streatham. I would gladly give way to the Minister if he would make that offer now.

I would not complain about the Jubilee line extension, even if it showed the lowest cost-benefit analysis return of the four new rail projects identified by the 1986 central London rail study. I am sure that it will be a state-of-the-art underground line. But where is the advantage in adding a few miles of the most modern metro in the world to the remaining 250 miles of London underground which is falling into greater decay and dilapidation?

In my view, London Underground is doing a terrific job in keeping the network running, generating an annual £200 million of its own funds for investment and moving as swiftly as it can to capital renewal of the system, even if that makes life difficult at times for underground users. My daily journey to work now involves my negotiating both work on a new ticket hall at Brixton tube station and work on a new escalator at the interchange between the Victoria line and the District and Circle lines at Victoria, and then emerging at the industrial site here at Westminster.

Mr. Norris: When the hon. Gentleman asks where the advantage is to the rest of the tube system of developing the Jubilee line extension, he falls into the trap of assuming that new developments have no impact on the existing system. But of course they do. One of the key advantages of the Jubilee line extension is that it will take travellers from Stratford, for example, directly to the west end. Those people currently use the Central line; the hon. Gentleman will know that even after a £830 million improvement, overcrowding on the east-west flow of the Central line remains a key consideration. One of the greatest advantages of the Jubilee line extension is that it will alleviate pressure on a piece of the existing infrastructure.

Mr. Hill: Again, I accept the Minister's observation. In passenger traffic terms, he must be right. But it is still worth returning to my original question: is the advantage that he describes great enough to justify devoting half the current capital programme of London Underground to a relatively short extension?

The truth is that on its present funding, London Underground Ltd. cannot keep up with the cross-pressures of the backlog of years of underinvestment in the system, together with increasing passenger demand. London Underground can now take on only the most essential engineering upgrades on the unseen parts of the system—signalling, track, bridges, embankments, and so on.

The rising backlog of renewals is highly visible even on the other parts of the system—the parts that passengers see. It would be an education for the Minister to see the appallingly decayed Bakerloo-Northern line interchange at the Elephant and Castle, or to witness the cave-like condition of many of the stations on the City extension of the Northern line.

It has been rightly said—I owe this quotation to the fascinating document published by the Centre for Policy Studies—that

"For many workers in London an underground station is the most dilapidated place they have to experience in their everyday lives."

No wonder so many of them prefer the modernity and convenience of the private car, and increasing car use will be the penalty for neglecting the underground.

This week the Department of the Environment's report, "Indicators of Sustainable Development for the United Kingdom", reminded us of the consequences of the continued supremacy of the great car economy in terms of higher energy consumption, congestion and declining air quality. The Government proclaim their commitment to reducing car dependency but systematically hack away at investment in our transport infrastructure—down 15 per cent. in real terms between 1991-92 and 1997-98. It is high time that the Government put their money where their mouth is, and they could make no better start than by significantly boosting their investment in the tube.

6.30 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): It is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) because he and I played an important role together in the all-party friends of the Northern line group, which helped to get the Northern line trains that will come on stream next year.

Of course, the hon. Member for Streatham displayed the irresponsibility that people in opposition enjoy.

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will soon enjoy being in opposition.

Mr. Marshall: I have no desire to enjoy that irresponsibility, and do not intend to this century.

The hon. Member for Streatham said that a greater percentage of Government expenditure should be devoted to London, but—naturally—his hon. Friends the shadow Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales say that there should be more Government expenditure in Scotland and Wales, those who come from the north-east want the Government to spend more in the north-east and those who come from the north-west say that more should go to that region.

Mr. Keith Hill: I come from London, so let us agree on that.

Mr. Marshall: We believe in a better deal for London, but the proposals that the hon. Gentleman advocates would not help London.

The hon. Member for Streatham spoke about an employment tax in London. Such a tax would help destroy jobs in London. London First may support the idea, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that the leading light behind London First is Lord Sheppard of Didgemere, from Grand Metropolitan. If one is part of a big multinational company, one is likely to be able to afford an employment tax in London, but if one asked small shopkeepers, who are struggling, or the small business man who employs two or three people, whether they wanted an employment tax in London, they would say no. Many official organisations that claim to be representatives of industry or commerce or farmers and so on are not representative of the opinions of many of those people.

Ms Glenda Jackson: My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) did not refer to an employment tax.

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

He referred to the idea, which has been presented by the transport initiative of London First, of businesses agreeing to pay to improve London's transport. The London chamber of commerce and the Confederation of British Industry are participating in that London transport initiative. Were it not for the fact that I know interventions must be short, I should read the whole list.

Mr. Marshall: Most people would regard a payment made by industry to a central fund as a tax. It is all very well for the hon. Lady to indulge in semantics, but that is how most people would view it. If they looked at their budget and found that there was a payment "to improving London Transport", they would regard that as a tax, which would reduce their profitability and might put some of them in queer street.

The point that I was trying to make before the hon. Lady asked me to give way was that some of those organisations are not representative of individual companies. I am sure that the Whip on duty, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), will have sympathy with the story that I am about to tell. In October 1990, when I was in Scotland, talking to some farmers, the farmers asked me, "Can you try to prevent us joining the exchange rate mechanism?" I said, "I have a lot of sympathy with your point of view"—as I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud would—"but unfortunately the National Farmers Union, which seeks to represent the farmers of the country, is telling the Government that they should do it, and do it now."

Those farmers were right; the NFU was wrong. Often organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry, which are run by large companies, which say that they are representative of industry, are not representative of small firms, which lack the time or inclination to send their major directors to interminable meetings to express their views. London First is not representative of industry; it is representative of its members, and they are not representative of every employer in this great capital.

There is a tradition that, when one speaks in a debate, one declares one's interests. The first interest I wish to declare is that, like my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg), I am an adviser to the Confederation of Passenger Transport. There is an historic symmetry in that appointment because, when I was convenor of the municipal transport committee in Aberdeen, my socialist shadow was the then Councillor Norman Hogg, the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. I am also, as the hon. Member for Streatham knows, chairman of the all-party friends of the Northern line group—friends of the Northern line not as it is, but as it should be, and as it will be next year.

Importantly, I travel by the Northern line and other routes on the London Underground. I can boast that I have asked more questions about London Underground than any colleague and made more speeches about it than any colleague—sometimes at anti-social hours.

Interestingly, early in his speech the Minister spoke about London Buses, which demonstrates some of the advantages of the Government's policy of using private management in transport. When London Buses started a franchise programme under which routes were put out to tender, there were substantial savings—I believe of more than 10 per cent.—in running costs, Spanish practices were eliminated and efficiency became the name of the game. When London Buses was sold to the private sector, one of the advantages to London Underground was that part of the capital received was reinvested in the underground to improve the quality of service.

Reference was made to the history of London Regional Transport, and to the fact that, between 1969 and 1984, it was the responsibility of the Greater London council. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who is on the Treasury Bench, was a member of that august body. I remember that when he gave a speech in the constituency of Ealing, Acton, someone asked, "What have you learnt since you became a member of the Greater London council?" and my right hon. Friend answered, "I have learnt not to admit that I am a member of the Greater London council."

That is understandable if one considers the way in which the Greater London council handled London Underground. London Underground's worst years—the locust years—were the Livingstone years, when emphasis was placed on cheap fares, not capital investment to improve the quality of service.

Ms Glenda Jackson: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the Fares Fair period of London Underground's history, when passenger numbers increased by 16 per cent. and road accidents—there is always a benefit—decreased by 3,500.

Mr. Marshall: Although of course the number of passengers increased, the problem with the policy was that, simultaneously, capital investment in maintaining and improving the service was held down. The Greater London council should have invested in improving the service, not in lowering fares. It is remarkable that Opposition Members who talk about the level of past investment—

Mr. Keith Hill: The hon. Gentleman asserted that investment in London Underground declined during the years of the Fares Fair scheme. My recollection is that that scheme operated from between approximately 1980 and 1984. He should therefore be interested to learn that, in 1980, investment in London Underground was £78 million. In 1981, it rose to £91 million; it decreased to £82 million in 1982; it increased to £110 million in 1983; and it ended up at £147 million in 1984. That does not sound like a reduction in investment in London Underground, as a penalty for the Fares Fair experiment.

Mr. Marshall: I was trying to say—I thought it was obvious even to some Labour Members—that the GLC clearly had a choice about how to spend money, and it chose to spend it keeping fares down rather than investing in the future. It is illogical that Labour Members, who are the spiritual successors to that body, should come forward in this debate and complain about past investment in London Underground, particularly as public transport in London is being transformed.

We have discussed the Jubilee line extension. I was somewhat surprised to hear the hon. Member for Streatham complain about that massive improvement in public transport in London, which will benefit not only the

economies of the areas in which the line will be extended, but passengers across the capital because it will take some passengers away from present routes.

There have been improvements to public transport in docklands. Earlier in the debate, we heard about the position at Heathrow, and the fact that the Paddington-Heathrow link will cut that journey time by about 12 minutes. That is a £300 million investment that has been provided substantially by the British Airports Authority.

The Northern line will be transformed. I am sure we can get cross-party agreement on the fact that, for years, it was the misery line in London. The misery line will be transformed into the most modern line in London. Many of the trains currently on that line date back to 1959. That year was a particularly good vintage in political terms, and let us hope that the trains that are coming in 1997 will have an equally good political vintage.

Some hon. Members may have noticed the announcement in the press this morning about

"London trams to return in £160 million deal".

We have been discussing the role of the private sector in funding new developments in London, and it is significant to examine who is funding most of that scheme. It includes groups such as Bombardier Eurorail, Sir Robert McAlpine, Amec Construction, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Centrewest, a bus operator. Three quarters of the project is being funded not by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Department but directly by private enterprise. Surely that demonstrates that the private sector is willing to come in and produce a better service for our constituents in London.

It is appropriate at this stage, although in his absence, to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who has been the first Minister for Transport in London. He has been a very effective Minister and there is a feeling of regret on both sides of the House that he will not be seeking re-election at the next general election. I think that people would give him the advice that was given to another politician: resign, retire, return. Many of us hope that he will return to grace our debates and to prove once again what an effective operator he is as a Minister of the Crown.

We have discussed the LU Northern line on many occasions in the House. I have explained that the trains are very old and that they are graffiti-ridden. There is so much graffiti on the trains that some of it is now two, three or even five years old. There is nothing more miserable than standing at a station at 7.10 in the morning and seeing a miserable, grey train coming in. We can only look forward to the day next year when we will see bright red and blue trains coming in that will lift our spirits.

Mr. Stephen: They will probably be covered in graffiti.

Mr. Marshall: They certainly will not be covered in grafiti, as my hon. Friend has said, because the new trains will be much more graffiti-resistant. It will be very much easier to get graffiti off in the future.

Graffiti is not the only problem with the LU Northern line. The dot-matrix system, which is called an information system, all too often is a misinformation system. Stations are tatty and they need improvement. That is why I welcome the Northern line's £1 billion regeneration, which is, of course, due solely to the PFI.

Ms Short: The proposal to have public-private partnerships to get more investment into transport was proposed by the Labour party long before the Conservative party moved to pick up that policy.

Mr. Marshall: It is very amusing to hear the Labour party claiming parentage of the PFI, because it seems that, whenever it is proposed, Labour Members criticise it. Those hon. Members who were in the Chamber yesterday for Health questions will remember what happened. Did the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) welcome the PFI? Of course she did not; she criticised it. There was even an interruption by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who was, no doubt, seeking to re-establish her socialist credentials. She was critical of the PFI. It sticks in the gullets of most Conservative Members to hear Labour Members come along and claim parentage of the PFI, when they have been completely scathing about every attempt to get private finance into improving the health service, education or transport. They cannot have it both ways.

Ms Short: I wonder if the hon. Gentleman has talked to anyone who has been involved in bidding under the PFI? If he does, he will find that many companies that have been involved in PFI bids are very critical about how it is structured at present.

Mr. Marshall: I know that BT, once it decided that the Labour party was a soft touch, thought that it would be rather fun to negotiate with the Labour party. Last October, it turned out that the Labour party was a soft touch and that it gave BT everything that it wanted.

People recognise that if one is bidding under the PFI, it is the Government's duty to get the best possible terms for the taxpayer, for the consumer and for the future of this country. It is quite wrong for politicians to stand up, as the hon. Lady has done, and say, "We will be a soft touch. We will let bidders get what they want." Surely that is not what government is about. The Minister should not be about signing the cheque that GEC wants. I am surprised at the hon. Lady saying that a Labour Government would give big business what it wants, and that this wicked Tory Government are being too tough on big companies.

Ms Short: Obviously the hon. Gentleman has not talked to people who have bid under the PFI. If the public sector asks the private sector to carry inappropriate risk, one problem is that the capital is attained at very great expense to the public purse. If we reorganise the PFI to distribute risk properly—properly hold the risk that belongs in the public sector with the public sector and get the private sector to take appropriate risk—we will get cheaper capital, which will be cheaper for the public sector.

Mr. Marshall: I am surprised at the hon. Lady. She has come to the House and, in effect, said, "The Labour party would like to be a soft touch. We would like to give GEC a little more of what it wants, and we would like to take more of the risk." She is obviously listening to the moans of poor GEC.

The idea is that poor Lord Weinstock is having to take more of the risk than he wants. Of course Lord Weinstock will be allocated more of the risk than he wants—after all, he wants the public sector to take all of it and GEC to take

[Mr. Marshall]

none. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), despite her left-wing credentials—I think she used to write for *Tribune*—has now revealed that she will visit poor Lord Weinstock in the other place to say, "When I am Secretary of State for Transport I will have a cosy party with you and Lord Prior, you can tell us the amount of risk that you want the Labour party to take, and we will take it." I never thought that I would hear the hon. Lady say, "I am the friend of GEC. These wicked Tories are the friend of the taxpayer. They want GEC to take the risk, but I would like the taxpayer to take it." I am amazed that the hon. Lady has come forward as the friend of the capitalist rather than of the taxpayer. Long may we witness conversions from the left wing of the Labour party—it is a badge of honour to be worn by the hon. Lady. I have made my point even if it took two or three interventions from the hon. Lady to do so.

The hon. Member for Ladywood is right that GEC has taken on risks for the Northern line which are currently borne by the taxpayer. She will also be aware that the principle governing the scheme into which GEC has entered is, "No train, no pay." On those days when a train comes along with the slogan "Not in service", which happens quite frequently at the moment, GEC will not be paid. Under the PFI, there is therefore every incentive for GEC to ensure that trains turn up. That is why it is currently investing £23 million in upgrading the Morden and Golders Green depots. That programme will safeguard the jobs of my constituents. Just as important, however, it will guarantee that those who travel on the Northern line will be given a good-quality service, which will enjoy decent maintenance. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London said earlier this week, half the current delays on the Northern line are caused by faulty maintenance.

I was somewhat surprised by the comments of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who said that ABB had withdrawn from the negotiations for the Northern line tender. The hon. Member for Ladywood may not be aware that I have spoken to representatives of that company many times and they told me that they submitted a tender. The company certainly did not retreat from the negotiations in the manner suggested by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North.

The Northern line is being regenerated because of the PFI. I have frequently discussed that line in the House and invited Ministers to travel on it. I was rather surprised by the hon. Member for Streatham, who asked how often the Minister for Transport in London had seen the Northern line at work. My hon. Friend has travelled on that line with me on a number of occasions and seen for himself the practical problems created by it.

We know that the Northern line's modernisation would not have occurred without the PFI and I believe that there is even greater scope for its application to other parts of London Underground.

Only this week we have witnessed the schizophrenic attitude of the Opposition to the PFI. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) welcome it, as does the hon. Member for Ladywood, who now says that she will be kinder to those private companies than the Government. We are aware, however, that the unofficial leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), the hon. Member for Halifax and other Opposition Members have criticised the PFI time after time.

I am also surprised at the attitude of some hon. Members to the modernisation of the Northern line. I welcome that as a Member representing a constituency served by the Northern line and as a passenger on it. That is why I was surprised by the comments on Monday from the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate, (Ms Jackson). Instead of welcoming the proposed improvements, she concentrated solely on the short-term difficulties caused by the brief closure of parts of the route later in the year. I am sure that everyone understands that when a railway system is modernised, it is sometimes necessary to close the track in order to improve its quality so that, in future, that track will not have to be closed and trains can run more effectively on it.

Such modernisation reveals why we should look to the future. In the next Parliament I hope that measures will be taken to transfer London Underground to the private sector. It is illogical for certain hon. Members to say in speech after speech that London Underground has received inadequate investment and then to say that it should not be transferred to the private sector. They suggest that public ownership has failed London Underground, but argue that that means that it must not be transferred to the private sector. I am appalled that those hon. Members advance such an illogical argument.

I believe that the privatisation of London Underground would improve the quality of service and the efficiency of operation and increase levels of investment. That is in the interests of London, Londoners, all those who work in our great capital city and the many millions of tourists who come here for enjoyment. I hope that that privatisation will take place. I apologise to hon. Members for the length of my speech, in part due to the fact that I gave way every time I was asked to do so.

6.56 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): May I add my congratulations to the Minister on his speech? We all enjoyed his bravura and generosity. It seems that, as the weeks go by, the shackles of office slip ever further from his shoulders. His free spirit fills the Chamber and adds a greater dimension to it. I for one am sad at the thought of him not being with us in the next Parliament.

The subject of the debate, the London Regional Transport Bill, seems to have been shunted into a side turning somewhere along the line in the past hour or so. At first sight, the Bill seems to be an innocent, almost pedestrian affair, as the Minister suggested. It has a mere six clauses, and is designed to tidy up the London Regional Transport Act 1984. It will allow LRT to do a number of sensible things to facilitate PFI projects connected with London Underground's power supplies; the introduction of smart card technology in the ticketing system; the exploitation of London Underground's fibre-optic cable network; and the extension of the east London lines. Those are sensible, sound ideas.

Within that simple, three-page Bill, however, lies a potentially powerful weapon about which many hon. Members have already expressed concern. It is rather like a snake in the grass—the smaller the creature, the more lethal its venom. The terms of clause 3 are so vague and so widely drawn that they give Ministers potentially

all-embracing powers to direct London Underground to do whatever those Ministers may wish. The Minister gave us a firm undertaking that that was not the Bill's intention, but, as he knows, and is so aptly demonstrating, undertakings, like Ministers, have a habit of coming and going.

In that context, the House will recall that the Railways Bill made no mention of the privatisation of Railtrack. On the basis of that legislation, however, the Government have found the means to pursue what I believe to be their ill-founded plans to privatise Railtrack without any further reference to the House. It would be unacceptable for the Bill to pass through the House in a form that would enable Ministers to privatise London Underground through a statutory instrument. I shall return to that later.

I shall deal with what is purported to be the Bill's main thrust: facilitating the PFI for capital projects to enhance London's passenger transport system. There is a danger of the Government being seduced by the idea that the PFI can be used to fund any public project or service, while hiving off all risks and responsibilities to private contractors. The concept of the PFI must be one of partnership between the public and private sectors.

If the PFI is to be a success, the Government must heed the warnings of the private sector, the banking sector and experts in financial management and the management of large assets. They are not contractors trying to make an extra bob, but people with responsible views on how best to finance and run the country's major institutions and engines. They argue that they suffer high costs from the tendering process.

Every negotiation for a PFI contract is treated as a unique contract. There is a desperate need for the Government to find ways of standardising the PFI process by introducing standard specifications and conditions, making the system more efficient, transparent and easily followed, and allowing negotiations and contracting to be made easier.

There must be a sensible distribution of risk. We have to recognise that, with the extended contract periods of the PFI arrangements, which can be for 20 or 30 years, there must be increased uncertainty about the responsibilities and the risks associated with them. With major project contracts, it has always been the case that there should be a clause to deal with force majeure. Over a period as long as 20 or 30 years, is not a change of Government or policy a force majeure that no contractor can foresee or take account of when assessing the risk? We must recognise that, when question marks are put into such contracts, the price immediately increases. The price to the taxpayer increases, not the profit to the contractor.

The message from the people, firms and organisations engaged in PFI contracts is that we need, through Government, to build and retain expertise in how to operate the PFI system. There is a clear case for taking the PFI out of the hands of the Treasury, which is understandably, and rightly, primarily concerned with cost-cutting and expenditure control. That is its function. The PFI's main contribution should be to increase investment, not to decrease the public sector borrowing requirement.

The Government appear to believe that public and private partnerships are an ingenious way of removing their more onerous responsibilities, while continually trying to place the majority of the risk on the private sector. It is hardly surprising that the companies that have become involved in the PFI understandably expect a higher return on investment to cover the higher risks. The Treasury has little understanding of the ethos of the private sector. There is a clear case—I would welcome a comment from the Minister—for considering a separate agency to deal with the PFI and build experience, expertise and confidence with the private sector.

It is worth remembering that the PFI was launched to provide additionality to public expenditure. It was to provide the means to fund projects that the public sector had difficulty in funding. In practice, it is being used more and more as a substitute for public expenditure. A good example is the channel tunnel rail link, which shows how Governments can abdicate their responsibility to provide timely financial backing for projects that are essential to the public good.

The Government are so anxious to grasp the short-term advantage of the PFI that they are failing to recognise and support the genuine opportunities to develop public and private sector partnerships to invest in London's transport system. Hon. Members have drawn the House's attention to the London First initiative, and there was some debate about the benefits of its proposals. It is important to bear it in mind that that is an initiative from the people of London to provide and develop an imaginative transport programme to take us to the year 2010, by combining public and private funding to develop a partnership and proposals for a transport infrastructure fund.

There was much debate about the assumed unfairness of big business imposing on small business a requirement for what some regard as a tax and what others might call a contribution to improving London's transport system. It is important to remember that London First's initiative talks about the business community being asked to decide whether it would support such a scheme through a surcharge on the non-domestic rate. That means the whole business community, not only the chambers of commerce or the CBI. That is a democratic process—something that we should recognise and encourage.

London First has proposed another initiative that the House and the Government should examine as a worthy way of helping to fund London's transport. It has proposals for raising revenue through congestion charging, with revenue being directed solely to improving London's transport system. Before hon. Members get into a state and say, "This is more taxation, more burdens on the taxpayer," both surcharges—or additional contributions through the business rate—and congestion charging are not merely ideas but in place and working very well.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am sorry that I will not be able to stay for the whole of the hon. Gentleman's speech. Will he reflect on what level of congestion charging would have achieved what the changed traffic arrangements in the City did, or would have left Oxford street as it is now, with private cars banned and pedestrians still able to walk faster than taxis or buses? Are they to be charged?

Mr. Chidgey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for taking me back 25 years to when I was involved in the pedestrianisation of Oxford street. The reaction from businesses and major hotels to the horrendous effect that stopping cars from driving by and parking outside their front doors would have on their businesses was amazing. A quarter of a century later, we have found that freeing major London streets from cars improves both business and the quality of life.

[Mr. Chidgey]

The level of charging for congestion or for using valuable road space in city centres has been established in cities throughout the world, from Singapore to Oslo. Throughout the western world, there are examples of how we could regulate access charges to valuable and much sought after road space in city centres.

Those ideas are not new; they are in place. They have been tried and tested and found to work. As usual, we hide and cringe from any innovation and let the Treasury damp down any enthusiasm by claiming that any such expenditure or fund raising would count as part of the PSBR.

To return to the PFI, which is the skeleton of the Bill, the PFI's main contribution should be to increase investment, not to decrease the PSBR. We must generate public and private partnerships that are mutually beneficial. I put it to the Minister that the Government should try to use the PFI as a source of front-end expenditure. The Government should try to lever in private capital, at the same time recognising that they should assume many of the risks that are primarily their responsibility. Long-term investment in transport and other essential services is too important to be left to the vagaries of the electoral cycle. The PFI offers an opportunity to escape from short-termism, and, through its devolution, to afford people more control over the development of their communities.

The Bill offers an opportunity to address London's key transport issues. By definition, London is the hub of much of Britain's transport system. London's transport policy is a concern not just for Londoners, but for those who live in the south-east of England and across the United Kingdom. The powers in the Bill could be used to pursue the essential aims not only of transport in London but of the transport system as a whole. The essential aims of London transport should be to improve the transport services, to maximise co-ordination and integration of existing services, and to improve accessibility to transport services for all those who live or work in London or who travel through the city.

We must ensure that there are safe, affordable and efficient links within and between all London's communities and transport terminals. We must protect London's environment and avoid the imposition of further environmental burdens on the south-east. Improvements in London transport will contribute to securing a more dynamic, efficient and sustainable economy.

I believe that the most effective means of implementing an integrated transport policy for London—such as I am outlining—would be through the establishment of a strategic transport authority for London. It would have the power to co-ordinate transport needs, encourage and support integration of services across the region, and provide Londoners with an effective voice on transport and land-use planning. Does the Minister recognise those key aims and objectives for London's transport? What role does he envisage for London Regional Transport in achieving those aims and objectives, with the benefit of the powers that it will acquire under the Bill?

In addressing the future of London's underground and rail networks, it is clear that a key aim must be the development of a co-ordinated and integrated system. We should not see piecemeal development that is dictated by the drive to maximise profits for a particular operator in a particular area: rail and underground services must operate and be available to passengers as a complete network. Investment must be available in order to raise standards across the network and improve the reliability and frequency of services. Passengers' interests must be the prime consideration, and the underground, bus and rail networks must be marketed as a total service underpinned by the travelcard system.

There is much evidence of the dismal failure to meet those aims and objectives. The Minister recognises that neglect of investment in the London underground system has led to the closure of the Bakerloo line and Northern line tunnels. He claimed that that was inevitable because of the passage of time. However, I believe that postponing investment in maintenance has magnified the scale of the necessary repair works, with traumatic consequences for millions of people who travel, live and work in London.

I do not blame the Minister for that situation, and I thank him for his earlier comments in recognising my fellowship of the Institution of Civil Engineers. I congratulate him in return on being awarded a companionship of that institution.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Congratulations.

Mr. Chidgey: It is indeed a high and exclusive honour—unlike so many honours that Conservative Members attain for their services to this place. I am sure that the Minister will take pride in that award for many years to come—whatever other honours may come his way as a result of his ministerial position.

As a companion of the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Minister will move in different circles, and meet the great men of engineering who visualise and plan major projects. Through talking to them, he must know that there were other ways of dealing with the problems presented by the Bakerloo and Northern lines, rather than forcing their closure for 18 months in the capital city. I do not expect the Minister to respond to that point now, but he may do so in a few months, following further conversations with my friends and colleagues.

The postponement of the Thameslink project to 2006, and the fact that there is no clear commitment to crossrail—the interchange for Thameslink and crossrail has not been constructed at Farringdon—are examples of the failure to plan and introduce proper transport infrastructure for London. The Minister may not be aware that the inability to reach a decision and the delays on that project are jeopardising the key project design and planning team, which is threatened with redundancy. That would be a tremendous loss to the impetus and progress of the scheme, as the team's skills are not easily replaced. They must be retained, and the project must be seen to go forward.

Will the Bill promote and strengthen an integrated, co-ordinated public transport system for London, or will it result in a fragmented free-for-all? Will the powers granted under the Bill enable Ministers to pave the way for the privatisation of London Underground? The Minister said earlier that that was not his intention, and I accept his word, but time moves on. Does the Bill provide an opportunity for privatising London Underground and fragmenting what must be an essentially integrated transport system?

It is interesting to hear Conservative Members' comments about privatisation, but privatising London Underground piecemeal would clearly prejudice

passengers' ability to transfer between the various lines at some 50 interchange stations in the network. The concept of passengers being unable to move between lines to complete their journeys is incomprehensible. Journeys across London would be made immeasurably more difficult, and the essential unified management of the station interchanges would be destroyed. Such unity is essential in order to maintain public safety in the event of an accident, such as the King's Cross tragedy.

I believe that the Bill must be redrafted to contain the clear and unequivocal statement that it will give Ministers no powers to privatise London Underground. Any such powers must be the subject of fresh, primary legislation—which the Liberal Democrats would oppose vigorously should it ever come before the House.

7.18 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I am grateful to be called to speak in this important debate. I feel as though I have joined a secret society comprising those hon. Members who are fascinated by the London underground and who spend their evenings in the House—rather than in other areas of the Palace or in their constituencies in Scotland or in Leicestershire in my case—discussing this interesting subject.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London for introducing the Bill. It is largely—if not wholly—an uncontroversial measure, which I suspect could have been disposed of in short order. However, I understand hon. Members' enthusiasm in wishing to contribute to the deliberations this evening.

The Bill is uncontroversial partly because few Labour Members represent London constituencies—as do few Conservative Members, although my hon. Friend the Minister is a wonderful exception to that rule.

The discussions that the Minister and I have had about transport matters have related predominantly to the Market Harborough bypass scheme. I was extremely grateful to him for coming—no doubt via St. Pancras, which is on the underground system—to look at the consequences of the bypass scheme and to see the traffic-calming measures that have exercised residents of that wonderful town for a few years. The point I wish to draw out of the Minister's journey from St. Pancras to Market Harborough is the fact that beside the present St. Pancras main line and tube station will be the cross-channel transport link, which is a classic example of the private finance initiative—provision for which is contained in the Bill.

The clauses of the Bill are designed to allow the PFI to be introduced into the workings, management and capital structure of the London underground system. In my view, the biggest project will be at St. Pancras—the underground station will no doubt be integrated with the overground station as a consequence of the Bill and the PFI.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made on 29 February, in which he announced this project—which I believe to be the largest construction project in London for some time, if not ever. He stated:

"The main CTRL"—

I cannot remember what that stands for.

Mr. Norris: It stands for channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Garnier: I thank the Minister. He continued:

"terminus at St. Pancras will provide an excellent interchange for services to the midlands and the north along the midland main line and the east coast main line, and also with the Thameslink 2000 project which I announced on Tuesday. The new St. Pancras terminus will, of course, respect the architectural integrity of that magnificent building."

That is a point for the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson)—I hope that his book contains a picture of the wonderful structure of St. Pancras station. It is one of the architectural gems of London. It sits above the underground station at St. Pancras.

Mr. Wilson: I agree about the architectural merits of St. Pancras. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that, as the public purse has paid for every penny of the refurbishment of St. Pancras station, it should not now be given away to a private consortium without any financial consideration?

Mr. Garnier: The public should enjoy it—and they will. The travelling public will be able to use the facilities in that building and in the new building, which will be of great benefit to them. It is King's Cross and St. Pancras—it is the same place. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State continued:

"The Government will transfer certain assets to the promoter: European Passenger Services, free of capital debt; Union Railways, the Government-owned company which has developed the project thus far and supported us in promoting the hybrid Bill; and, lastly, the land and property needed for the project, in particular the railway lands at Kings Cross and Stratford, and surplus properties acquired in connection with previous rail link schemes.

The Government will also provide financial support with a present value of around £1.4 billion, compared with the overall construction cost of about £3 billion. That is an excellent investment for the nation"—

I agree with him—

"since we estimate the benefits of the project to be worth around £6 billion".—[*Official Report*, 29 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. 1000.]

That money will be spent in London, and will be indirectly, if not directly, spent on the underground system—in which the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North apparently has such a great interest.

Mr. Wilson: The problem for the Tories is that they do not know which faction to be part of at any given time. The hon. and learned Gentleman is taking the view that it is an excellent public investment—excellent value for the public purse—to put £1.4 billion of public money, plus a couple of billion pounds of assets, plus a £1.5 billion debt write-off, into this. Does that not put him at odds with Lord Parkinson, who, in 1989, vetoed the scheme on the ground that not one penny of public money should go into any of it?

Mr. Garnier: I am not as old as the hon. Gentleman and I cannot remember Lord Parkinson or anything that he may have said in the House. The hon. Gentleman gave a characteristically bravura performance—I always enjoy his contributions to the House. On another evening, much later than this, he spent about 45 minutes prolonging a debate on vehicle excise by giving us a Wilson's tour of the highlands and islands, which was fascinating.

[Mr. Garnier]

This evening, he has confined himself to half an hour and, at times, he managed to bring himself back to the terms of the Bill.

The Bill does not allow the so-called reasoned amendment that the Opposition has put down on the Order paper, which reads as follows:

"That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the London Regional Transport Bill because although the House welcomes the higher levels of investment in transport infrastructure provided in the Bill by the development of Private Finance Initiative projects by London Regional Transport, it does not believe that the privatisation of London Underground would be in the interests of London, and fears that this Bill contains powers which will be used to that end".

I have looked at the Bill to see whether that fear is justified. I shall refer to the explanatory and financial memorandum on the face of the Bill.

Hon. Members may be interested to know that the notes on clauses provided by the Department, the House of Commons Library brief and—if I can give away a top secret—the central office brief seem to say more or less the same thing: this is an uncontroversial Bill. There is not one shred of evidence to justify the Labour party's fears that this is a back-door privatising measure.

The second paragraph of the explanatory and financial memorandum states:

"The Bill empowers LRT to enter into agreements with contractors for the carrying on by the contractors of any activity which LRT does not have the power to carry on".

I shall compare that with the national health service: it cannot build hospitals, it does not always do the laundry, and it does not always provide the food—it buys those services from private companies. That is not privatisation: it is a sensible use of public money to enable public corporations—such as the national health service or London Regional Transport—to get the best of what is available in the private sector.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that according to the *Evening Standard* of 5 March, Jimmy Knapp, the leader of the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, called the Bill privatisation by the back door? Does my hon. and learned Friend think that Mr. Knapp may have drafted the Labour party's amendment?

Mr. Garnier: I gather that, under new Labour, all the doors have been relabelled—so we cannot be sure whether Mr. Knapp knows what a back door is. I was seeking to disprove the soundness of the case put forward by the Labour party's amendment. The explanatory and financial memorandum continues:

"*Clause 1* empowers LRT, subject to the Secretary of State's consent, to enter into certain agreements with contractors for the carrying on by the contractors of activities which LRT does not have the power to carry on.

Clause 2 makes provision, subject to the Secretary of State's consent, for LRT to acquire land".

I refer again to the national health service which, through trust boards and health authorities, can acquire land. That is not deemed to be privatisation by the back door, front door or through the roof.

The memorandum continues:

"*Clause 3* enables the Secretary of State, by order, to provide that certain of LRT's statutory functions are exercisable by another person".

A whole host of nationally important functions are carried out on behalf of the Government or on behalf of public bodies by individuals who are not part of the Government machine or who are not direct employees of public bodies. There is no diminution in the quality of the oversight or of the service provided by those individuals.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Would the hon. and learned Gentleman be happy if the train drivers did not work for London Transport? Would that be acceptable?

Mr. Garnier: What is important is that the driver of the train is qualified to do so. I ask the hon. Gentleman: would he be happy if a fully qualified brain surgeon performed an operation on his head, but happened not to be employed by the national health service? Of course he would. He would be interested in whether that specialist had the necessary skills and qualifications to perform the operation.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): The hon. Gentleman does not need one.

Mr. Garnier: It is not for me to enter into personal banter with my hon. Friend, or to make comments about what is inside the head of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew).

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) is precluded from speaking in the debate, because he is the parliamentary private secretary to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, I want to pay tribute to him for the work that he has done on behalf of his constituents to ensure that the Government and London Transport are kept fully up to the mark with regard to the southern end of the Northern line, about which a great deal has been said this evening. He has pressed vehemently for improvements in rolling stock, particularly new arrangements through the PFI, which was discussed earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and which has provided huge improvements to what used to be called the misery line, but which I understand can no longer be so called.

My hon. Friend the Minister and many other hon. Members this evening have described this wholly uncontroversial Bill as a technical measure. It removes legal obstacles which would otherwise prevent LT from getting on with what it should be getting on with. This is part of a range of initiatives that the Government and the Department have entered into during the past year or so in order to introduce private finance into these huge and most important publicly needed projects.

Listening to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), I found it extremely difficult to decide whether he intended to vote for or against the motion, to abstain, or perhaps to go for a combination of all three. No doubt we shall discover later this evening.

I hope that, by the end of the evening, when members of the official Opposition have reached a conclusion and no doubt drawn into the Chamber to listen to their arguments all the other London Labour Members of Parliament who wish to hear the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, they will have had a change of heart, having realised that their amendment is meaningless and contains the seeds of its own destruction; and that

they will either go quietly away and abstain, or will enthusiastically join the Government in voting for the Second Reading.

7.31 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), at the behest of the Secretary of State for Transport, began his contribution to this evening's debate by referring to the channel tunnel rail link. The Secretary of State pointed out to him the relevant passages in *Hansard* when the Secretary of State made his announcement to the House. I am presupposing that, as the hon. and learned Gentleman had to have the initials CTRL translated for him.

Mr. Garnier: I am not a professional actor so I am not as good at learning my lines as other hon. Members may be. I should inform the hon. Lady that the Secretary of State did not put me up to speak about the channel tunnel—whatever it is called. What I did was, because I am a Leicestershire Member whose constituents use St. Pancras station, ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the details and the reference in *Hansard* since I knew that he had spoken about it on the occasion that I mentioned. I appreciate that there must be a degree of to-ing and fro-ing in a debate such as this, but I would not like the hon. Lady to advance her case on a false premise.

Ms Jackson: I am grateful for what the hon. and learned Gentleman has said, but clearly the Secretary of State is desperate to make his case since he left the Front Bench and went to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough. If the hon. and learned Gentleman was asking for information, I should have thought that it would have been more courteous for him to have gone to the Secretary of State.

However, that was the opening of the hon. and learned Gentleman's contribution. He referred more than once to St. Pancras station and to what has been handed over to the designated operator by the Government, which has been estimated to be £5.7 billion of the nation's assets in cash and kind and, if memory serves, he believed that that was a good exchange for the country.

Writing in *The Guardian* on Monday 4 March, Victor Keegan, in his economics notebook, the headline of which was, "Public taken for a ride on railways", said:

"Don't be deceived by claims that the fast rail link is a triumph for the Government's private sector finance initiative. As the Financial Times pointed out on Saturday, this scheme may even be costing the Exchequer more than the British Rail option which bit the dust in 1989",

and would in fact have cost just £1.4 billion as opposed to the £5.7 billion the CTRL is now costing us. He goes on to say:

"There is no chance of the private sector extending the link to the north unless the Government, as usual, underwrites the whole risk while leaving the profits for someone else."

That is what is at the heart of the Opposition's concern about the Bill.

In common with, I believe, every other hon. Member who has spoken in the Chamber this afternoon, I congratulate the Minister for Transport in London on a sparkling and entertaining speech. We have come to expect the Minister to be invariably entertaining, but he excelled even his high standard this afternoon. He spoke for more than an hour and he was generous in allowing interventions. The fact that 99.9 per cent. of the time he managed to deflect attention away from the Bill is a great compliment to his abilities. In common with other hon. Members, I think that it is sad that the House will lose his presence if he is true to his word and does not stand again at the next election.

The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) claimed to have spoken more often, asked more questions and made more speeches regarding the Northern line than any other hon. Member. It must be a bitter agony to him that after all those questions and speeches and after all that time, he managed to bring about absolutely no improvements on what has become known as the misery line without the aid of the all-party Northern line group which, by excessive pressure, managed to get the Government to move from what seemed an intransigent position to consider the proposals that at that time were being presented by ABB on the leasing of new rolling stock for the Northern line.

Here again, I must pay tribute to the Minister, who assisted the all-party Northern line group in bringing pressure to bear upon the Treasury and assisted in at least getting new rolling stock on one of the oldest sections of the oldest underground system in the world.

The hon. Member for Hendon, South was somewhat excessive when he suggested that the leasing of new rolling stock is somehow transforming the misery line into some modern, efficient and consistently reliable line. That is not what I and my constituents know it to be. We will indeed have new rolling stock, but that is about all that will be new. There will still be the agony of waiting to see if the trains will arrive because the track and signalling have yet to be modernised. All that is in the future. The plans that the Government have presented to us this afternoon via the Bill do not lead me to believe that we will be seeing those improvements in the near future.

One of the most charming aspects of the Minister's speech this afternoon was the way in which he presented London underground as being already almost perfect. His description bore no relation whatever to the London underground that I know and which anyone who has occasion to use it regularly will know to be the system for this, our great capital city.

We could undoubtedly argue all night and probably all day tomorrow about the root cause for London's underground system becoming, according, I believe, to the *Evening Standard*, the worst underground system in the world. Opposition Members have made strong representations that the basic root cause has been the failure to invest adequately in it during the past 16 years. A briefing put out by the Capital Transport Campaign in November 1995 speaks of broken promises and says:

"In 1991 the Government commissioned an investigation into London Underground by the Monopolies and Mergers"Commission—

This blamed "chronic underinvestment" for deficiencies in the levels of service—this was five years ago—

"and recommended that investment rise to around £700-750 million a year.

In response, Malcolm Rifkind (then Transport Secretary)"—

he is now Foreign Secretary—

[Ms Jackson]

"said the Government was 'committed to providing the resources for both improving the existing underground and expanding the system'. He promised that investment in the existing railway would be over £700 million by 1993/94. Last year it was just £528 million.

In 1991—just before the general election—the Government also promised £2.1 billion over three years for the existing underground. In the Autumn Statement the following year it was slashed by £700 million. Last year the Chancellor cut the three-year figure back to just £1.2 billion."

The system has had reduced budgets and many broken promises from the Government on the investment that is desperately needed to make the London underground "a moderately modern metro", to quote the managing director of London Underground.

The infrastructure is in serious trouble. For example, London Underground has to remove more than 3 million gallons of water from the system every day. The pumps and the drainage systems were designed in the Victorian era. The problem of flooding was identified in an internal London Underground report in 1993, which stated that emergency investment in drainage systems—at a cost of £18 million—was required simply to keep the network operational. In the event, only £9 million was made available and current investment in the drainage system is running at £5 million a year.

I find it hard to believe—although I would be delighted to be proved wrong—that the Government's private finance initiative, as it is at the moment structured, would attract that level of investment to London's underground system. I regret to say that I have forgotten which of my colleagues made the point—it may have been my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill)—but the drainage system is one of those hidden problems into which the private sector is always somewhat slow to put its money. The private sector tends to like to have its contribution publicly emblazoned and visible. Something as basic as modern pumping and drainage systems would be unlikely to attract the private part of the private finance initiative, given—as my hon. Friends have pointed out—that the system as devised at the moment by the Government is both cumbersome and expensive for those businesses which would be interested in entering a public and private partnership—we consider that the best way forward—to invest in the vital and necessary infrastructure of our capital city and the rest of the country.

The lack of investment has led to speed restrictions being imposed on a number of routes and, unless the problem is tackled in the next three years, whole sections of line face closure. We have already had advance warning from London Underground of major closures this year on four lines—the longest and, it could be argued, the most serious being the Bakerloo line, which is expected to be closed for between six and seven months. There are also speed restrictions on the East London line, between Surrey Quays and Wapping; on the Central line, between Stratford and the west end; on the Northern line, between Leicester Square and Moorgate—although it seems on some days that there are speed restrictions to the point at which no trains are running at all on the Northern line; and on the Piccadilly line, between Piccadilly and King's Cross. That is not the only area on the London Underground system that is in desperate need of major investment.

If we look at the supporting structures of the underground, we find that at Sloane Square station last year a supporting girder cracked and the platform had to be closed. There was no risk to passengers or staff on that occasion, but that girder was fitted in 1868. The problem of aging support structures is compounded by the age of the network. We have the oldest underground system in the world. The East London line was built in 1869, the Metropolitan line in 1863, and the Circle and Hammersmith lines in 1863.

The track on the network is now so old that the number of speed restrictions on the network has doubled over the past two years. London Transport has videos showing the track physically bending as trains run over it. I would hate Conservative Members to accuse me of scaremongering. It is not my intention to suggest that the bending of the track is necessarily a danger to the millions of people who use the underground system every day, but it significantly lengthens journey times and increases the deterioration of the track and the rolling stock. Renewal expenditure alone in 1994-95 was £56 million, but even that level of investment is insufficient to tackle the problem.

Most of the embankments—not an invisible part of the network—on which the track is built were built and designed in the Victorian era. The Victorian building techniques involved piling up mounds of earth that were then overlaid with the rail line. As a result, large sections of the network face problems of subsidence and land slippage. London Transport is engaged in a costly programme of reinforcing the embankments with steel girders to deal with that problem.

I return to the subject of that well-known misery line, the Northern line. Signalling on parts of the Northern line is pre-war. The cost of replacing the signalling on just a small section of the network will be £22 million.

That is enough of the depressing list, which I could lengthen with no great difficulty, to show that there is, and has been for a considerable time, a total lack of the necessary investment in what surely should be the central and supporting arm of London's transport system.

We have heard contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I regret that I do not know their constituencies in some cases. We heard about the enormous benefits that have been produced for the travelling public by the introduction by the Government of passenger and citizens charters. I know, from talking to my constituents, that charters have increased complaints and smoothed the line between the consumer and the provider of the service so that it is easier to make complaints, but they have not improved services.

Much was made during our debate on fares on the London underground that fare revenues could be used as part of London Transport's central investment structure, but we know that some fares have risen in real terms by 70 per cent. in the past 10 years. For many people, who have no other means of transport to and from home and work other than the underground, the increase in fares can be an increasing burden, especially as the Government have been assiduous in the past few years in ensuring that wage rises have been kept very low.

The point was made that there is already a way of stopping trains on the underground because a driver can close together two wires that run along the tube train tunnels. That is fine, but I have read about the possibility of totally unmanned underground trains without even a driver—although I cannot imagine that they are going to be any part of the Government's plans in the future. There is enough technological expertise around at the moment

to allow trains to run without any staff on board at all. I would not want to travel on such trains, and in any case I cannot see it happening in the foreseeable future.

The last clause of the Bill has to do with reductions in staffing. That causes me some concern. One of the first ways of cutting costs in previous privatisations has always been to reduce staff numbers. I know that the Minister has said that there would be no overall reduction in staff numbers; staff employed by London Underground will simply move, he says, to the private business that is due to enter the two schemes to which he referred. I find that unsatisfactory. Whenever private businesses have taken over from public sector entities, in whole or in part, there have been staffing reductions, wage reductions and usually an extension of the hours that staff are used to working.

I am most concerned about the gradual erosion of LU manning levels and its impact on the safety of the travelling public—especially women. Perhaps the popular press like to dig up stories on this subject, but lately there seem to have been too many reports of attacks on women travelling on their own late at night on certain parts of the underground system.

I approach this issue with no small trepidation. Belsize Park station is one of the stations on my line. I had occasion to raise this matter with the managing director about a year ago. The station contains many long, empty and usually badly lit tunnels. There are no staff on duty late at night. People have to catch a lift which rides down a very long way—the line is deeply sunk in that part of north London—often to alight on a platform that is deserted. There are no staff in sight; there is no means of summoning anyone should an incident occur.

Environmental reasons are certainly paramount when it comes to attracting more people to the underground system—presupposing that London Underground can run a system that meets Londoners' genuine needs. That being so, however, we need to guarantee that everyone travelling on the underground is safe.

Mr. Norris: I acknowledge that the hon. Lady has been stalwart in defending the interests of women passengers, and she raises a serious point about their safety. I know that she will want to reinforce the fact that although there have been worrying incidents on the system, the underground's safety record has measurably improved over the past five years because of steps that London Transport has taken and paid for to make the system safer. LRT recognises that unless people feel safe on the system they will not use it. I know that the hon. Lady would not want to create the impression that passengers on the system are unsafe. Statistically they are safer on the system than in the streets up top.

Ms Jackson: I accept that, but I hope that the Minister will agree that I was describing one type of transport on the network at one particular time—night. Statistical improvements, moreover, mean nothing to a woman who may be raped when attempting to travel on the underground. Statistics meant nothing to one of my constituents whose son was killed in an accident on the underground.

Mr. Norris *indicated assent.*

Ms Jackson: The Minister knows who I am talking about. She will be convinced to her dying day that her son's life could have been saved if there had been a member of staff standing on the platform, or if there had been any means of halting the train or summoning help.

There is still room for a great deal of improvement. The most immediately recognisable and reassuring form of improvement would be an increase in staffing at certain hours on the underground.

Despite its pronouncements, London Underground has not done enough yet to make its services accessible to people with disabilities. I can understand the difficulties, but there is a need for major investment, and the Government's private finance initiative will not produce the investment necessary to modernise the system or make it accessible to all Londoners wanting to travel on it.

The PFI, as devised and structured by the Government, is the Government's way of opening the back door to privatising a service which I believe must remain in the public sector. The Opposition believe that the only way to provide the right amount of investment for this system and all our public transport systems is via a genuine public-private partnership. The Government's PFI is not the way forward.

We strongly urge Conservative Members to look at our reasoned amendment with open minds. We all agree that London needs a modern, integrated public transport system, not just for the benefit of the people who live here but for the millions of tourists who come to this great capital city of ours. We need such a system for the economic prosperity and for the well-being of this great city. If we do not sort out our transport problems, companies looking to invest here may go elsewhere. The City might conceivably lose its primacy as well. Information technology and the Internet make it quite possible for financiers, bankers and people who make money by moving it around to relocate their businesses in one of Europe's other capital cities. So a decent transport system for the capital is a vital economic and national necessity.

The arguments expressed in this debate have made it abundantly clear that the Government have not chosen the right way to proceed. I hope that Conservative Members will seriously look at our amendment and consider voting with us, thereby putting the interests of their constituents before those of the party Whips. I hope that they will join us in the Lobby tonight.

7.58 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I have listened carefully to the debate. I tried to understand exactly the arguments that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) was advancing, but I am not sure that I am any the wiser in determining exactly where she and her right hon. and hon. Friends stand. The hon. Lady talked about a partnership between the public and private sectors. It was to be noted, however, that whenever the private sector was mentioned, the reference was disparaging. In those circumstances, I am not sure why the private sector would wish to invest.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister. Unfortunately, I was unable to listen to the whole of his speech. I heard, however, a tour de force on London's transport system. My only disappointment arose out of my hope that he would give us a potted history of each and every station on the network. I am sure that, on another

[Mr. David Congdon]

occasion, before he leaves the House, he will do so. I am sure that such a presentation would be fascinating. It would enhance his contribution, which has already been excellent, to transport in our great capital.

Mr. Tim Smith: I am sure that the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister was a tour de force. Would not it have been a tour d'horizon if he had covered all the underground stations?

Mr. Congdon: That is true. I welcome my hon. Friend's comment.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate commented on problems that stem from a lack of investment in London Underground. Since the early 1990s, however, investment has increased significantly. When I listen to debates about the underground system and talk of a lack of investment, it seems to be suggested that problems have arisen only since 1979. I remind the hon. Lady that the Conservative party was in power for only four of the 15 years from 1964 to 1979. What were the levels of investment in the underground service during the dark years of Labour government? During those years there was little money in the kitty for anything and the then Chancellor of the Exchequer had to go running to the International Monetary Fund, begging bowl in hand.

That has been the pattern of investment in the London underground system. When the economic climate has become difficult, money has not been forthcoming. That is why the private finance initiative is so important, especially to a service that is as capital intensive as London Underground.

As a London Member, I am only too well aware of the importance of the underground system to Londoners; as a Member from a Croydon constituency, I am aware of how regrettable it is—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will take due note of this—that the system never managed to penetrate beyond Crystal palace towards Croydon. Indeed, it never reached Crystal palace. Some say that that was because of geological reasons. I am not so sure.

I want to illustrate the importance of the underground system to Londoners. There being no underground stations in my constituency, I recognise how crucial the system is to the transport system as a whole in our great capital.

In transport debates, there is always an argument about whether people should use their cars and whether there should be a congestion tax. That is what we heard from the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). It leads to a sterile debate about either public transport or the private car. There is a lack of understanding of the crucial role of each in a city such as London.

In the Croydon area, the car is crucial in getting to the city centre. The train is vital in travelling from Croydon into central London. The tube is vital in getting about central London. I have always believed that different transport systems have different roles to play. The crucial role of public transport is to get a large number of passengers from A to B, but such a system will never be able to satisfy the myriad peculiar journeys that many people make, especially outside peak travelling hours. The sooner some Opposition Members recognise the key role of the car, the better. They should then put public transport in its proper context.

In London, and especially in south London, my colleagues have not been arguing for more investment in the road network. Instead, they have been arguing for investment in the rail network, including the underground system. As London Members, we recognise the need to ensure that we have a first-class underground system that is able to meet Londoners' needs.

I am never too clear whether too much priority is given to grandiose projects at the expense of some basic infrastructure when it comes to investment in the underground system. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate mentioned important, but unglamorous, issues such as signalling and track maintenance. London Transport needs to get the investment balance absolutely right between large projects, such as the Jubilee line extension or other major investments and extensions, and bread-and-butter improvements to the basic infrastructure.

I draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to the situation at Victoria station. It is a crucial station on the network used by Croydon residents. There are excellent rail links from East Croydon station to Victoria, but standing on the Victoria line platform during the morning rush hour is a pretty hazardous experience. There are difficulties if one tube train does not come in immediately after the other.

I understand that the main impediment to achieving a fast throughput of tube trains is the lack of very modern signalling that can introduce built-in intelligence into the system. More antiquated signalling systems tend, unfortunately, to be the norm on the network. It is surely important to be able to maximise the benefits of the massive investment in tunnels by ensuring that sufficient tube trains pass through the system, especially at peak times, so that any dangers to passengers may be avoided.

My plea is to ensure that the balance is right between grandiose projects and bread-and-butter projects. I understand, of course, London Transport management's pressing for big schemes, but more minor projects may be neglected.

I argue—this might be controversial, but I make no apology for that—that ensuring that track is absolutely right and that the signalling system is the most modern available should take precedence over modernising tube stations. I accept that it is important to have modernised stations, but I do not believe that that is as fundamental as having the most up-to-date signalling system and ensuring that track is improved.

There has been significant investment in the underground system. I have mentioned the Jubilee line extension. The PFI involving Northern line trains is another example. In a sense, it becomes false to distinguish funding between London Underground and British Rail. I welcome the recent massive commitments to London in the forms of Thameslink 2000 and the channel tunnel rail link. Those projects demonstrate that the Government are serious about directing large sums into public transport, which is vital to the life-blood of our great capital.

Given the history of capital investment being turned on and off like a tap depending on the state of the economy, surely Opposition Members should welcome the PFI with open arms. It provides an opportunity to secure a continuing high level of investment in a vital infrastructure. In a sense, of course, the Bill is a tidying-up measure to remove one or two anomalies in London Transport's powers. I am surprised, however, that it has not been welcomed by Opposition Members.

As I have said, I listened with care to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate. It seems that the Opposition are concerned that the Bill might lead to the privatisation of London Underground. I have no problems with that. I do not care who runs the system as long as it is run well and provides a first-class service for Londoners. As I understand it, however, the Bill is not about privatisation. We may be able to return to that issue on another occasion because it is certainly worth considering.

I was intrigued by some of the proposals that are in train—pardon the pun—for London Underground. I was especially interested in the discussion about using cables alongside the network. The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) talked about using cables for various activities. Putting fibre-optic cable alongside the underground track is an excellent suggestion. Surely that would be far better than digging up the road to lay the cables that the Labour party seems to consider so important to our infrastructure. If the Bill provides the possibility for such developments, it should be supported.

The most important aspect of the Bill, however, is its encouragement of the private finance initiative. I hope that many more projects will be possible, providing Londoners with a much improved public transport infrastructure. As I have said, Londoners depend on the existence of a first-class public transport system. We do not want more and more people to drive into the centre of town in the morning rush hour unless that is essential—and the quid pro quo, unless we resort to draconian measures, is sustained investment in the public transport infrastructure.

Unlike the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate, I do not think that the real terms increases in fares that have taken place constitute the most serious disincentive; I think that the main disincentive is delay.

Ms Glenda Jackson: May I point out that millions of Londoners have no means of travel other than public transport, which, in many instances, means the underground? For them, fares are of major significance. For example, 56 per cent. of those who live in Camden have no access to any form of private transport. The fact that the hon. Gentleman's party has kept wages down and allowed fares to rise has caused real difficulties for many of my constituents.

Mr. Congdon: With respect, I consider that argument nonsensical. If fares are kept artificially low, the net result is that Londoners—and others, but when the Greater London council was in control it was Londoners via their rates—end up subsidising wealthy tourists to use the underground. That is absurd. There is another net result that is equally significant. The Minister mentioned it earlier. If fares are kept low, London Transport cannot generate surplus revenue to reinvest in the capital infrastructure of the network.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): My hon. Friend has made a valuable point. Does he agree that considerable concessions are already available to those in need—pensioners and students, for example, who have their own travelcards? Most of those who pay for tickets at the normal rate are in work.

Mr. Congdon: My hon. Friend has made a good point. Such schemes are very helpful.

I do not accept that, when people are deciding whether to travel by road or rail—or by bicycle, perhaps—their choice is determined primarily by price, especially in the rush hour. I believe that it is determined primarily by the nature of their journey. For those who live near an underground or overground railway station that method of travel is very convenient, but it is inconvenient for those who live some way from a station and whose place of work is some way from the station at the other end. I believe that the key factor is convenience in relation to people's travelling patterns—and, as I have said, the incidence of delays is crucial.

A far better way of encouraging more people to use the network with the minimum of inconvenience is to invest in maintaining it to a high standard, ensuring that the signalling works properly and that the track does not cause problems. There would then be no excuse for delays. I mentioned Victoria underground station. The one problem with using that station is that it is not very pleasant to stand on the platform in a crush because there has been a delay as short as two or three minutes. We need investment in signalling, to ensure the maximum number of trains at peak times. I hope that investment via the PFI, over a certain period, will yield the improvements that we all want.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): If, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) suggested, users of the London underground were heavily subsidised, would that not be a monstrous injustice to residents of south and south-west London, where underground lines are extremely sparse because the railway network is the old British Rail southern region and, before that, Southern Railways? Nevertheless, people there have to pay their taxes and local taxes to subsidise the inhabitants of the hon. Lady's constituency. Is that not unjust? Surely we should have nothing to do with it.

Mr. Congdon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At the time of the GLC's Fares Fair policy I, as a Croydon resident, did not like having to subsidise other people's fares, and I am sure that many of my constituents would have felt the same.

Ms Jackson: It was something of a revelation to hear the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) talk about something other than military bands. May I ask him, and the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon), how people in Twickenham will benefit if the air that they breathe is thickly polluted with fumes from petrol-driven vehicles? I know that my constituents would much prefer cars to be taken off their roads. One of the problems is this way of looking at London as if it were a series of totally separate entities, rather than perceiving that the failure to meet its transport needs is one of the reasons why, in transport terms, it is in such a mess.

Mr. Congdon: I certainly accept that it is right to look at London's transport needs as a whole. As I have said, my constituency has no underground stations, but I do not object to the investment of large sums in London Underground. However, I take issue with what the hon. Lady said about her constituents' wanting to get cars off the road. That really means that people want to get other people's cars off the road, but to continue to drive their own.

[Mr. Congdon]

I am afraid that all the arguments about restraining cars, through bans or congestion taxes—as suggested by the hon. Member for Eastleigh—are dishonest in terms of the electorate. Most people with cars want to be able to use them. The challenge to transport policy is to ensure that, especially during rush hours, people have a realistic alternative and that they can be sure that, if they turn up at the station, they can expect a train to arrive and to take them to their destination on time without their having to leave two hours earlier than they would otherwise have done.

The best way of encouraging people to leave their cars at home is not to ban or restrict the use of cars, but to ensure that trains run reliably. That is why I support the privatisation of British Rail. It is why I support the private finance initiative and it is why I welcome the announcements of further investment in London's transport infrastructure that have been made in the past couple of weeks. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his efforts to ensure that London has its fair share of transport money. As was pointed out at Question Time on Monday, the vast majority of his Department's spending on London goes to public transport rather than on roads. I have no problem with that and, particularly because I come from south London, I am happy to support the Bill.

8.19 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) as he is an old friend of mine and I agree with much of what he said. He made an especially important point when he said that, although the price of public transport is important, people are essentially looking for reliability in terms of a good public transport system. If it is published that a train will leave the station of departure at a certain time and reach the destination at a certain time, people want to know that on the whole that is likely to happen because they have appointments and meetings to get to and they are busy people.

My constituents have told me that they would not mind paying a bit more to travel in from Beaconsfield, Gerrards Cross and Denham on the Chiltern line to secure a bit of investment, a reliable service and decent trains. That important point demonstrates that, although price is important, a number of other factors are involved in assessing public transport.

Mr. Wilson: Does the hon. Gentleman think that, through public investment, the Chiltern line provides a decent service? If so, why does he want to give it away?

Mr. Smith: The service is not being given away. People in the present management are among the most enthusiastic about privatising services.

Mr. Wilson: They would be.

Mr. Smith: Of course—they know that they can provide an even better service if the shackles of public ownership are removed from them. I have discussed with Mr. Adrian Shooter, managing director of the Chiltern line, his plans for privatisation. The investment has been a success and we have a better service, but let us not be complacent about this. There is always room for improvement. On the Chiltern line in particular, there is tremendous room for improvement in using assets more effectively. We need an effective marketing campaign. Mr. Shooter believes that he will be able to conduct that campaign much more successfully in the private sector.

I do not know whether Mr. Shooter will win that franchise, but I hope that he does because the management has done a good job and would do an even better one if the company were in the private sector. Therefore, the privatisation of British Rail has my full support, I do not understand how anyone can fail to support it when public ownership has been so disastrous in the past 40 years.

Mr. Wilson: I am sorry to intervene again, but I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's argument. He says that the public service on the Chiltern line is disastrous—to use his word. He says that a public service, delivered within the public sector, paid for by the taxpayer and operated by Mr. Adrian Shooter et al, is disastrous. Is that his position? If not, he is proposing that the public sector should pay for the assets and that the profits should go to a private operator. Where is the long-term perspective in that?

Mr. Smith: I said no such thing. I said that, generally, since nationalisation, British Rail's history had been disastrous and most people would agree with that. In many ways, the Chiltern line is an exception to that rule. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] It is. Not many hon. Members can say perhaps, as I can, that most of the customers of the line in their constituency are satisfied with the service. Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency and improvements could and will be made if the service is privatised.

I better say a word about the Bill. I was pleased when, on 28 February, I discovered that the Government had decided to publish the London Regional Transport Bill because it is a model Bill. It will have no direct effect on public expenditure or on public sector manpower and it will not create any compliance costs for business. Those are three attractive characteristics.

On 28 February, I was serving on the Standing Committee considering the Finance Bill, which ran to some 200 clauses and about 30 schedules. Another tremendous virtue of this Bill is its brevity. It has six clauses. Into those six clauses, the Opposition have managed to read privatisation. I have considered those clauses carefully and I cannot find any reference to the privatisation of London Underground Ltd. I have therefore concluded that the fears referred to in the Opposition's so-called reasoned amendment are utterly unfounded.

My understanding of the Bill—on more than a cursory reading—is that it does something important for London Regional Transport. It removes commercial shackles that were inadvertently placed on it by the London Regional Transport Act 1984. The Bill has my full support because I am a strong supporter of the private finance initiative. All public sector bodies, including London Regional Transport, should make maximum use of it. There has been much talk in the House about how Conservative Members cannot provide any concrete examples of the PFI in practice, but I have two almost concrete examples—I say almost concrete because the M40 will be not concrete, but tarmac.

The first example is the widening of the M40 motorway between Denham and Loudwater in my constituency from three lanes in each direction to four in each direction. I am pleased that, because of my tireless efforts, a surface called porous asphalt will be laid on that motorway and much less noise will result. The important thing to note about the contract is that it will be the subject of a so-called DBFO contract. DBFO is a bit of PFI jargon. It stands for design, build, finance and operate.

The Department of Transport is considering tenders for that contract. Soon a contract will be awarded to one company to take over work on the whole of the M40 between Denham and, I believe, Warwick, to operate the whole motorway and to widen the first section. That substantial contract would not be taking place if we did not have the excellent PFI.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that in PFI projects it is important to ensure that risk is genuinely transferred to the private sector?

Mr. Smith: It most certainly is. That is one of the reasons why there has been some delay. Some critics of the PFI have said that it is not moving along quickly enough. I sympathise with that view and with the construction companies that have been expressing it, but the PFI is new and it is extremely important that the Government should ensure, as my hon. Friend says, that risk is fully transferred to the private sector. That may have been a slight sticking point in some of the negotiations. I understand that in the case to which I have referred the delay has been minimal and that we can expect construction to start later this year.

The second example is the PFI contract to extend Wycombe hospital. That excellent national health service contract was referred to by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Budget day as an example of attracting private sector money into the health service. The Labour party immediately says that this is privatisation, but of course it is not—it is simply doing something intelligent. If we have finite resources, as we always will have for the health service, why not bring in private sector resources to supplement them with a capital project of some scale?

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that even though that hospital project was mentioned in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech, still no contract has been signed to complete it?

Mr. Smith: I can confirm that only last week I received a letter from the chairman of the South Buckinghamshire NHS trust telling me that he was making good progress and that the project was on track. As it is one of the first PFI contracts in the health service, he is leading the way and he is having to ensure that he gets it right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East would say, the chairman wants to ensure that the risk is transferred to the private sector. He tells me, however, that the project is on course and that we can expect an announcement reasonably soon. I am confident that it will go ahead.

The same applies to LRT. It, too, has a limited amount of cash to spend, so it is sensible to create opportunities for it to supplement whatever the Treasury feels able to make available through PFI contracts. I understand that the present legislation is such that there is some considerable doubt whether that is possible. That is why the Government have introduced the Bill and I welcome it for that reason.

As someone who represents a constituency on the periphery of London, but with large numbers of constituents who are commuters travelling not just on the Chiltern line, not just on the M40, but on the underground from Amersham, my perception is that the service has improved greatly over the past few years. There has been a tremendous amount of investment in London Underground. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East referred to that in his speech and he was right. In a way, it is disappointing that so much money has had to be devoted to safety measures, but what higher priority is there than safety? After the King's Cross fire, it was essential that priority should be given to getting rid of the old wooden escalators and replacing them with modern non-wooden escalators. A great deal of money has been spent on doing that.

As I travel around the London underground system, I am constantly impressed by the quality and quantity of the improvements that have been made. I was at Angel tube station the other day—I had not been there for some time—and I was amazed by what I saw. There used to be a platform in the middle with a tunnel over the top and trains coming in on each side. People felt exposed standing on that platform. The station has now been transformed.

A great deal of work is being done at Bank and on the connection with the docklands light railway. The whole complex is substantial. London Underground has put up a helpful explanatory note about the complicated works. It is spending millions of pounds improving transport facilities for Londoners. I am a great supporter of London's underground. I always travel around London by tube. Anyone who takes a taxi from here to the City needs his head examined. One need only pop on the tube at Westminster to be at Blackfriars, Mansion House, Cannon Street or Monument in a matter of minutes. The same will be true when the Jubilee line is complete. Access to docklands will be transformed. We will be able to travel from here to Canary Wharf in 14 minutes.

The other great LRT success is the transformation in the bus services. The Public Accounts Committee recently examined the sale of the bus operating companies. The Department and London Transport excelled themselves. A report by the National Audit Office concluded

"that the Department and London Transport achieved the sale objectives. No purchaser achieved more than a 25 per cent. share of the London bus market. The Department and London Transport completed the sale virtually on target and successfully promoted employee participation in the sale. Four of the ten companies were purchased by management and employee teams.

At £233 million, gross proceeds were substantially higher than expected. A high level of interest was generated by London Transport's marketing campaign and some bidders were more optimistic than expected about the prospects for their targeted business. London Transport, the Department and their respective advisers successfully devised a bidding process which took advantage of this. They generated substantial bidding competition and obtained final prices which were some £30 million higher than the eventual purchasers' initial indicative bids and some £70 million higher than the mean of all indicative bids."

That was excellent.

[Mr. Smith]

The PAC has examined many privatisations and many lessons have been learnt. The NAO report is excellent—indeed, a classic of its kind. The report concluded:

"Overall, the sale was managed effectively. London Transport and the Department took account of best practice from previous sales and the recommendations of the Committee of Public Accounts. For example, they set clear sale objectives, clearly defined responsibilities, established a project steering group and project director, introduced clawback arrangements on property and commissioned a benchmark evaluation."

My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London did all that, and I congratulate him on his achievement. It was a very successful sale, as the NAO has confirmed.

What is more, London Transport's customers will benefit in the long run from the fact that those companies are now in the private sector and have a big incentive to improve and provide the best possible quality of service for their customers. At the end of the day, it is all about customer service—about providing quality of service whether on the underground or on the buses. The way to do that is by bringing in the private sector more and more, so that there is greater competition and better service. The Bill has my support.

8.35 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House, as although I was present at the beginning of the debate, I had to leave the Chamber to attend a meeting of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and therefore missed much of the earlier part of the debate.

It is a remarkable comment on the Government's management of the private finance initiative that we should be spending our second full day this week on rather hasty and brief Bills that have appeared out of nowhere, but which are required to reassure private sector finance sources before they provide funding for private finance initiatives.

Yesterday, we spent the day on the National Health Service (Residual Liabilities) Bill which, on my reading of it, is even more alarming than this Bill. The NHS Bill provides NHS trusts with security for borrowing potentially enormous sums outside the control of the Secretary of State. It will also have the effect of shifting the risk back from the private sector to the public sector—in direct contrast with what we heard a few moments ago about the requirement for the private sector to take over all the risk. The NHS Bill will achieve exactly the opposite, in an attempt to secure private finance for the national health service.

During recent weeks, the Select Committee has been taking evidence on the PFI from a large number of interested parties. It has become clear that the transport sector is a much more appropriate area than the health service for the application of private finance. The particular reason for that is that the construction of transport infrastructure or the acquisition of new rolling stock creates future revenue streams, typically fare income, that would not have been available otherwise. That can be used to release a sum of privately provided capital for application today in establishing infrastructure, without affecting public finance in any way.

That is not the case in the health service. When a new hospital is built new, small revenue streams may be created from charges for car parking, from the sale of refreshments in the cafeteria or from sales in the hospital shop—but that revenue is insignificant compared with the cost of building the hospital. Ultimately, the whole cost of the Wycombe hospital referred to by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) will be met from taxation. As capital provided under the PFI is more expensive than capital provided directly by the Government, there is every likelihood that hospitals built under the PFI will, in the long run, cost more than hospitals funded by conventional means.

The position is different with transport because there is the opportunity to use future fare revenues, which might attract significant private finance that would not otherwise have been available to the project without a heavy call on public funding.

I must take issue with the hon. Member for Beaconsfield about the M40. I am sceptical about the ability of the PFI to generate additional revenue in projects such as the widening of the M40. It will not lever any significant additional finance from the private sector. Ultimately, the whole cost of widening the M40 will be borne by the public sector in future payments in future years.

Mr. Tim Smith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, in effect, the cost will be spread over a number of years, perhaps 30. The point is, however, that the capital will be provided by the private sector now and if it were not, the widening would not take place at all.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's point, which makes exactly my argument. We are not gaining anything new. We are just deferring payment to future years. Since those payments will have to be made for many years to come, there will in future years be fewer resources available for the investment in transport infrastructure that we all want around London and elsewhere.

When additional revenue is created—I am thinking particularly of the construction of railway lines or the acquisition of new rolling stock—the use of private finance is beneficial, but that is not so in the construction of new roads or the widening of motorways unless tolls are imposed. Although that is a different debate, it at least attracts additional revenue.

The principle of the use of private finance is much less contentious when applied to London Regional Transport than it is when applied to the subject of yesterday's debate. The Bill is more problematical because it raises the prospect of slipping towards privatisation—specifically of the underground—by stealth. I was present for the exchanges between the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) about the extent to which the Bill is simply a technical measure. Unlike the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon), I certainly would not support the privatisation of London Underground. I do not think that it would benefit underground passengers, and I do not think that the vast majority of underground passengers believe that it would either. There are many reasons that one could give in support of that view. The underground's future depends and will always depend on substantial public sector support and, therefore, the case for privatisation is not very strong.

Mr. Congdon: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument carefully. Will he at least concede that the one thing that London Underground is able to do is generate a significant income stream because its operating revenue is more than its operating cost?

Mr. Timms: I entirely accept that. That very fact means that there is potential for the use of private finance in developing London's transport network, about which I shall make some specific points and cite some instances in which I think it will be particularly important.

Mr. Spearing: On creeping privatisation, is my hon. Friend aware that, in a later exchange, the Minister did not deny that there could be wholesale contractorisation, which would amount to privatisation in all but name of existing services, such as power supply, and new railways such as the Hackney-Chelsea line and the line from Whitechapel northwards? In effect, therefore, the Bill is, as it were, blood transfusion by PFI. As my hon. Friend has been learning about that, will he confirm that it gives powers to plan, finance, build and operate?

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I was not present for that exchange, but I entirely agree with him that splitting up the underground network in the way that he has implied would be a seriously retrograde step. It is most important that we maintain an integrated, publicly owned underground network.

Nobody can deny that there is a need for additional capital investment in London Transport at all levels, from the very small to the very large. Some of those requirements might be suitable for the application of private finance—some most certainly are not. I was elected in June 1994 and a couple of weeks later I met the District line management about the need to refurbish East Ham and Upton Park underground stations in my constituency. Exactly the same concerns relate to Plaistow station in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South. The stations are old and grim and have been neglected for a long time. They have the potential to be restored to a much more attractive condition. There is a lingering charm about their structures, the potential attractiveness of which I would not want to minimise. It would not cost a great deal to make them attractive again.

Those stations are also extremely heavily used. East Ham is one of the seven or eight most heavily used stations on the entire underground network. Indeed, the revenue that it generates for London Underground is also in the top seven or eight revenues generated by all stations in the whole system. Much less well used stations, which generate much less revenue, further down the line have been improved and refurbished, yet East Ham, Upton Park and Plaistow—indeed, the whole string of stations from there down to Aldgate East—have not been refurbished.

The then business manager of the District line attended the meeting to which I have referred. We met at the stations and he assured me that there would be substantial refurbishment in that financial year. Indeed, he even told me the identity of the contractor who had been selected to carry out the work. A few weeks later, however, that commitment was withdrawn. I was told that it had all been a misunderstanding, that there had never been a scheme for carrying out work on the stations and that we would have to wait considerably longer for it to be carried out. I was very upset and surprised by that turn of events.

I subsequently met the chairman of London Regional Transport and I am pleased to say that another good scheme has been proposed. This time I have seen the drawing so I know that the scheme exists to refurbish all the stations from East Ham westwards. In fact, some work has already begun. Closed circuit television has been installed and is operating at East Ham station. I commend the fact that at long last that work has been carried out. It is a considerable reassurance, especially to women using East Ham station and others who use it late at night, as many do.

The rub is that the bulk of the refurbishment scheme on those stations will have to await a decision of the London Regional Transport board, which I understand is to take place in the next month or so. The scheme will have to compete with others. It is necessary and I very much hope that it will be given the go-ahead, but the truth is that there is not enough capital going around even to carry out that essential maintenance. Until that capital is available, the fabric of the network will continue to decline, as it clearly has done in recent years. I do not think that in the particular instance that I have described—station refurbishment—private finance will help much. Elsewhere it may.

The best case that I have seen made for increased investment in London's transport network was made by London First, whose programme has already been mentioned in the debate. Its document, "London's Action Programme for Transport: 1995-2010", is an impressive, well-presented overall view of the needs of London's transport infrastructure. The Minister was present at its launch in the autumn.

I recently received London First's annual report, and I shall read one or two sentences from it, which show what that organisation says about its plan, its programme and the response that it has received so far from the Government. In the introduction the chairman, Lord Sheppard, says,

"London's Action Programme for Transport: 1995-2010, published by the London First Transport initiative on behalf of the London Pride Partnership in the autumn, is a landmark document"—

I agree with that—

"the first comprehensive and fully costed plan for London's transport needs in 20 years."

The fact that there has been nothing like it for 20 years is startling, but I think we know the reasons why such an important plan has not been drawn up for such a long time.

Lord Sheppard continues:

"The challenge for London First in 1996 is to show that, with full commitment, the plan can be made to work and to demonstrate that the benefits to London and the UK from doing so will far outweigh the modest extra investment required."

In his review, the chief executive, Stephen O'Brien, explains how the plan was drawn up. He says:

"The Programme is based upon realistic and positive assumptions about London's future and calls for an end to the short-termism which has characterised transport funding and development under successive administrations. It contains three main elements

action to improve existing transport systems

a new infrastructure programme and

an estimate of the funding required.

The total cost over 15 years is estimated at £23 billion. Of this, £11 billion would come from the public sector and, spread over the life of the programme, would not represent a higher average annual expenditure than at present.

It calls on the Government for immediate decisions on

commitment to a consistent and adequate programme of investment in the Underground

assurance of the funding necessary to accelerate the completion of the bus priority and cycle networks

authorisation to start the statutory procedures for Thameslink 2000"—

[Mr. Timms]

of course, we have made some headway with that in recent weeks—and

"firm commitment to proceed with CrossRail."

The chief executive's report goes on to say:

"The first test for the Programme was the November 1995 Budget which . . . failed to provide the level of funds called for in our Programme."

Mr. Norris: Surely the hon. Gentleman has not dealt with the statement in the London First report adequately. He correctly identified the sentence in which the total programme over 15 years was valued, and pointed to the extent of the public contribution that London First assesses might be necessary, but he neglected to mention the balance that London First acknowledges can be provided through various forms of private finance. Is not that figure as large as the figure that London First suggests should come from the public purse? Does not that fact make the point behind the Bill, which would facilitate that large proportion of private finance that London First itself says must be aggregated with the taxpayer's contribution?

Mr. Timms: Consistently throughout my speech I have said that I accept the need for private investment in the development of London's transport, so I agree with the Minister there. However, what I want to emphasise is the fact that London First says that last year's Budget was the first test of the programme and that it

"failed to provide the level of funds called for in our Programme."

Lady Olga Maitland: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's reservations about the private finance initiative. He has said that he accepts it, but under something of a socialist scheme. Does he not agree that his party's proposals would make the PFI a sham, because it would be so restrictive that it would drive away investment, and thus would not achieve the real inward investment that we hope will come into the transport system. Labour's proposal simply would not work.

Mr. Timms: I do not agree with that at all. Indeed, as I said earlier, what we saw yesterday was an attempt to shift risk away from the private sector and back into the public sector. The word "sham" could well be used in that connection, to describe the attempts to use private finance in the health service.

I have said throughout the debate that we need private finance in the development of London's transport system, and the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) can rest assured that that will be successful under a Labour Government.

I have only a few minutes left, so I shall make my final point. I greatly welcome the recent announcement that the Government will support the proposal for an international passenger station at Stratford on the channel tunnel rail link—a project in which the Minister has taken a close interest for many years. I am delighted by the outcome of the Government's decision-making process. The announcement was the best news that east London has had for 50 years. It was also good news for the prospects for imaginative development of public transport in this country.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East was rather uncertain about the prospect of the completion of the Jubilee line, but I welcome it. The decision about Stratford highlights the need for a planned dispersal by London Regional Transport from the channel tunnel rail link.

St. Pancras is already overcrowded and it is not easy to travel from there to the most likely destinations. Crossrail would provide us with the opportunity for people to leave the channel tunnel trains at Stratford, get on to crossrail and travel to their destinations in central London, the west end, Heathrow and elsewhere by rail. Ideally, I would like to see a connection to crossrail from the channel tunnel rail link at Stratford—and an amendment has been tabled to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill to facilitate that.

I emphasise the fact that when the Jubilee line is complete, if the Government simply maintain the level of investment now going into it and use it to build new rail infrastructure, that will be sufficient to build crossrail. I hope that when he replies to the debate the Minister will be able to say something about the prospects for crossrail in the light of the deliberations that I know are already under way.

I have no doubt that private finance will need to be secured to build crossrail, and I am happy with the idea. I hope that we can achieve real progress in giving the scheme the go-ahead quickly.

Finally, I endorse what my hon. Friends have said in the debate and what London First, too, has said: we need an adequate and consistent level of finance. We need both. Investment must be not only sufficient, but stable, consistent and predictable, so that LRT knows where it is and we can develop the transport infrastructure that London needs for the future.

8.57 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am fortunate indeed to catch your eye in this important debate. I am only sorry that so few Labour Members are listening to an important debate that affects the lives of Londoners.

Brentford and Isleworth, my constituency, is blessed with seven tube stations and two tube lines, which I estimate are used by about 8,000 of my 80,000 constituents daily. The tube is the life-blood of my constituents, who use it as a means of reaching the City and elsewhere, and part of their everyday life. I therefore find the Bill an important measure—but a marginal one—in the great improvements that must be made in London Underground.

I should say, as an aside, that often my constituents have written to ask that Turnham Green station be more frequently used by the tube lines, which sometimes do not stop there.

The private finance initiative is an important step in introducing private finance to the process of improving our transport infrastructure. The measure is essentially technical; it is not revolutionary or earth-shattering. It will allow London Transport to take full advantage of opportunities for increasing investment.

Much of the London Underground network is very old—Victorian—and needs substantial investment. Accordingly, the Government have increased investment to record levels in recent years—to £1 billion in 1995-96.

Much of that investment has been directed to upgrading the Central line, which is now nearly complete, and constructing the new Jubilee line.

The benefit of private finance is that the Government and London Transport will look to the private sector as a source of further substantial investment. The Labour party, however, appears totally unaware of the great changes in capital financing of infrastructure projects that are taking place throughout the world. Labour Members talk as though they are on another planet—another economic environment.

The useless, almost asinine, debate about whether finance should be private or public shows a failure to understand that there is no such thing as public finance. Public finance is drawn only from people in the private sector making enough returns to pay taxes so that the Exchequer can put that money back into the coffers—the investments—of the economy. Public finance is not created uniquely by any group of people—civil servants, Ministers and the like—creating enterprise for themselves. They simply use the private sector's money in a different form.

If we can enable the private sector to put its money directly into improving our infrastructure projects without the interference of Ministers, civil servants and even parliamentarians, so that the return on capital is fair and equitable, what is the sense of that asinine point that the Labour party keeps wheeling out?

I was fortunate to follow the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) and the earnest speech by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms), but I say to my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London that we must consider the private finance initiative in the light of the way in which private sector investment is improving the infrastructure of much of the globe.

The world is changing rapidly. One cannot keep capital at home. Capital is global and moves to find the right rates of return. No party—not even the Labour party—can prevent British capital from moving out of Britain to find a better rate of return elsewhere. We are competing with other countries for the capital that is here, which should be invested in our infrastructure projects. That is why, although I may sound rude when I say so, I find the Labour party's argument very muddled. Labour Members do not seem to know what they are talking about.

Today, even the World bank—that great instrument of international development—the International Finance Corporation and our Commonwealth Development Corporation are investors with the private sector in building roads, power stations and water systems with private capital in far-off places such as the Philippines, Indonesia, India and Malaysia. That private capital seeks the highest rate of return, provided that the risks are fair.

Against that competition, we must encourage the same capital sources to fund our infrastructure projects and to develop our infrastructure. Throughout the world, schemes such as "build, own and operate", "build, own and transfer", and "build, lease and transfer" are operating. In the past few years, £6,000 million has left this country to be invested in India alone. In the past five years, £30 billion has left this country to be spent on infrastructure projects around the world. We need that capital here to develop our infrastructure. If we are unable to give the best rate of return for that capital, it will not stay here.

I must say to my party and to the Opposition that cautious little measures such as the Bill, introduced drip by drip, ain't going to do the job. We need to be as bold and imaginative as other countries, which have taken such investment opportunities by the horns and attracted our capital, our insurance investment funds and our pension funds. That capital is now building roads, toll systems and many other things in those countries. We can move forward to attract private finance only by avoiding the muddled thinking that the Labour party has been peddling all evening and taking a clear, decisive view that we need to put such a private finance policy into operation as soon as possible.

Mr. Wilson: Given the hon. Gentleman's evangelical zeal about this matter and the £30 billion that he said has unnecessarily left Britain to fund public-private projects in other countries, he must surely be deeply ashamed at how late in the day it was before the Tory party embraced the PFI.

Mr. Deva: Not at all, because the Tory party has created the climate in which that capital could be accrued. The Tory party created the climate that has turned our country into a major investor in various projects around the world. Last year, this country accrued £36 billion in dividends from our overseas investments, both indirect and project investment. It was not our party that left behind a ramshackle state of affairs in 1979, and which created a climate that led investment to go abroad. Now the Tory party has created the climate for that investment to be made in this country.

With great respect, when the Labour party talks about understanding private finance, I laugh because it has not the slightest idea what it is talking about. It is clear tonight that Opposition Members still do not know what they are talking about in terms of private finance and capital project investment.

For that reason it is important that even this small Bill, which is not a revolutionary one, should not be opposed as it has been tonight. It should have gone through on the nod because it is part of the continuing progress that we must make to involve the private sector in the development of our infrastructure. I therefore support the Bill.

9.7 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): First, may I say three cheers for this excellent little Bill? I am merely sorry that I was not in the Chamber when my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London opened the debate because I know from experience what a witty speaker he is. He has a constant twinkle in his eye and, more than that, he has always taken a great interest in some of the causes that I have put before him. I have taken constituents to see him who have been concerned about red routes in London and he has offered them a sympathetic ear. I also remember from a debate on roads that we had a shared concern about over-zealous local authorities putting in road humps, about which I have powerful and strong feelings.

The Bill is a significant and important one because as a traveller on London underground I rejoice in the fact that the Government have not only spent more than £1 billion on investment in the past financial year alone,

[Lady Olga Maitland]

but have recognised the importance of making sure that we have an underground system that is ready and capable of coping with travellers' needs way into the next century.

The truth is that good transport in London is not only important for residents and for those who work here, but important to those who travel here from all over the country; to those who invest here from overseas; to those who decide to base their business headquarters and companies in London and to the many tourists who come here. They come for many reasons but one is that they can get around our great city.

As a traveller, I feel safe on our London underground. I would not say that about the New York subway. I have travelled many, many miles on the London network, which covers 200 stations, because I know that it is reliable and gets me from A to B. I accept that it is sometimes slowed down by signalling problems but by and large, I know that I can set out at a certain time and get where I want to go. A good example of that, and one where timing is crucial, is getting out to Heathrow airport. The last thing that I would want to do is miss a plane. If I tried to go by car, I could face indescribable log jams that would cause frayed nerves. Travel on the underground means getting there on time and without a frazzled mind.

The efficacy of our underground means that it is safe, although there have been instances of handbag snatching. By and large, I do not feel at risk. Nor is there any danger to the safe management of the underground. It upsets me when Labour tries to suggest that if we bring in private investment—or come the day, on which I would rejoice, that the system is privatised—safety will go awry. That is not true. It did not happen with British Airways or Stagecoach. They have gone from success to success.

This is an effective Bill that is designed to bring investment and resources for projects that everyone accepts cannot not be paid for from the public purse. The question is how to bring the money in. The Labour party hops from one leg to the other. It says that it is in favour of the PFI, then it is not, then it is, then it is muddled and then it wants restrictions on investment. Companies will not play its game. They will go away and leave the taxpayer with the cost. That is another spending pledge by the Labour party that this country will not wear.

Under the Government's scheme in this effective, neat little Bill, funding will be provided to give us a thoroughly modern metro system with new and refurbished trains.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but I am tired of the burblings on the Opposition Front Bench.

Lady Olga Maitland: Burblings are about as much as the Labour party can produce.

Not only will the investment that I was describing give us new and refurbished trains on all lines, it will help us to provide more frequent services, faster journeys, less crowding, high-quality stations, greater capacity and a better general standard of services. It will help locally with other aspects of infrastructure such as reliable lifts and escalators and provide new opportunities all around.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Bill is that it enables projects that need big capital outlays and a broader perspective. I rejoice that the Bill could provide resources for better communications in the underground service. The use of fibre-optic technology will mean a better, faster, more efficient system for the underground service and better information services for passengers. In sum, it will be a communications service that takes us well into the next century.

I welcome the investment in the prestige ticketing system. Its technology will also take us well into the next century. I like the idea of a smart card system, which will undoubtedly modernise London Transport ticketing management; let alone the idea that it could be interactive with the bus service. The contractor would be responsible for selling and checking tickets, and basically assume all the responsibilities that London Underground does not need to handle. There must be considerable investment in order to ensure an efficient power supply and the Bill will allow that to occur.

I am encouraged by the fact that there is no shortage of prospective investors in any of the three areas. I understand that about 10 serious inquiries have been made to each sector and that, all told, potential investment could total £750 million—money that would otherwise come out of taxpayers' pockets, which is clearly what Labour Members favour. There is no doubt that the legislation will benefit all concerned.

I am sorry that Labour Members are being rather churlish about the Bill. I do not understand why they have tabled a reasoned amendment—I do not think that it is at all reasonable. They suggest that "privatisation" is a bogey word and that is irresponsible. Labour Members remain in the stone age while countries across the globe are following the British example and privatising their industries. The Labour party is out of touch: it has no credibility when it comes to economic management.

We are planning a transport system of which London can be proud. London is a respected world capital and we want to maintain that position by enhancing our existing facilities. I have no doubt that the Bill will provide a thoroughly decent and modern metro system. That is a real, not an elusive, goal and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on introducing the measure.

9.16 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), particularly in the light of her reference to the importance of London. London's prosperity as a tourist centre—not only because of the millennium, but year in, year out—is of tremendous value to the economy of the United Kingdom as a whole and affects the prosperity and the employment of the entire country. It is essential that the transport and economy of London are buttressed and placed in a flourishing position as soon as possible.

My hon. Friend spoke about less crowding on the London underground. At about 6.30 this evening I saw a very crowded Piccadilly line train. As a matter of fact, I have spent nearly all of today travelling to and from the funeral of a relative in Wales. For that reason, I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the Minister and to the House for having missed most of the debate.

I was driving back to London along the M4 between Heathrow and London. As I came to the raised part of the motorway, I saw a Piccadilly line train—at that point the track is above ground—travelling along a viaduct about

10 or 12 stations and eight or nine miles out of central London. It was packed with people and I could see through the windows that the pressure upon the passengers travelling home from work, or perhaps in some cases to Heathrow, must have been hugely uncomfortable. It is very important that investment in the underground relates to capacity and to steps that will eliminate crowding in the long run.

Of course, it is true—as hon. Members have already said, including my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith)—that there has been a huge amount of investment in London Transport in recent years. We have had the Victoria line, and the Jubilee line is now well advanced and under construction—as we can see in the square outside the building every working day of our lives. It is very important that the Jubilee line is completed and goes out to Greenwich in time for the millennium exhibition—apart from its vital need to serve people in south-east London.

There is the prospect of crossrail; and on the way to Heathrow—not the underground, but a surface railway line—an extension of the line from Paddington, with its spur to Heathrow, in which my hon. Friend the Minister has been greatly involved in recent years. That will be of enormous benefit. But there is not, and has not been, enough investment. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are right to point out the need for more investment in London transport—and I do not mind whether it comes from public or from private sources, as long as it takes place and enhances the quality and the capacity of the London underground service.

I used to be a member of the Greater London council, about 25 years ago, and it used to control London transport. The Greater London council and the London county council before it were usually Labour-controlled—and they did not provide enough investment for it. The fact is that there has been a backlog in investment over the years, and this Bill will do something—even if it is only a marginal amount—to put matters right by enhancing the provision of investment in London transport, which is what we need and which both sides of the House ought to encourage.

Transport by the tube has always been uncomfortable. I can remember that in the Greater London council's county hall library there was a book called "Traffic and Theatre Rhymes" by Guy Boas, who I believe was a schoolmaster. One of the rhymes was called "The Underground" and it went as follows:

"The underground goes round and round and also to and fro

And men in blue look after you and tell you how to go

They never quite direct you right, although of course they know

The platform man has got a plan for dealing with the queue

He makes men wait behind a gate until their train is due

They watch their train depart again and then he lets them through".

That is an annoying reflection of officialdom on the London underground between the wars. There is another poem in the book "Traffic and Theatre Rhymes", which relates not to the underground but to trains generally. It is:

"When a puffer
Meets a buffer
One of them
Is bound to suffer
If the buffer
Then the puffer
Knows itself
To be the rougher
If the puffer
Then the buffer
Knows itself
To be the tougher
If the puffer
And the buffer
Both unhappily
Should suffer
Then the buffer
Knows the puffer-
Must be driven
By a duffer".

There are a lot of duffers in this place, and most of them are on Opposition Benches. I think that it is important in these matters constantly to seek to improve standards. I am glad to see that the Secretary of State has just arrived. When he was a member of the Greater London council about 25 years ago, he wrote a pamphlet, which I remember reading, about building up tourism in London. Although his pamphlet was mainly about hotel provision, it touched on the underground and on the railway system as well.

It has already been pointed out in this debate that approximately 25 per cent. of the passengers on the London underground are overseas visitors. As I have already said, the expansion of tourism is vital to the economy of London and the economy of Britain as a whole. If we are to encourage tourism, we must ensure that our transport facilities are not only efficient but pleasant.

Research by the Society of West End Theatre showed that when people decide to go to a play in the evening their choice is affected not only by whether they think that they will like the play itself, but by the whole idea of the outing—their refreshments, transport, parking provision and so on. If they do not like the transport, they will be put off from going to the play. The theatre is one of the things that pulls visitors into Britain and London as tourists. People will not come to London and Britain in such large numbers if the transport facilities are not satisfactory, pleasant and comfortable.

I would like to see sponsorship and the private finance initiative, on which I have heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State speak, extended not only to tickets and stations, but to the trains themselves. If, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield suggested, one was catching a tube from here to the City, one would get on a train which might have, say, a Tesco carriage, a Sainsbury's carriage and a Marks and Spencer carriage. One would then have companies whose names everyone knows vying with one another in order to promote facilities that are pleasant and attractive. Their good name would depend on the quality of the carriages and the comfort and convenience of passengers. They would have

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

every incentive to ensure that the transport was more comfortable, more pleasant and less crowded than it is at the moment.

I would like to see that included in the Bill and I hope that when my hon. Friend the Minister replies, he will cover all those points. It is on the future quality of public transport in London that wealth, prosperity and employment in London so largely depend. I have great pleasure in supporting the Bill, but I should like to see it more widely drawn and that should be attended to in Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Brian Wilson, with the leave of the House.

9.27 pm

Mr. Wilson: I was trying, on the back of an envelope, to compete with the poetic efforts of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel). I got as far as,

"The debate has concluded without rancour,

Although the last speaker was the hon. Member for Twickenham."

It was a little unsporting of the Tory Whips to keep the crème de la crème of Tory Back Benchers to the last. In the past half hour we have had a veritable banquet of elocution. It is a tribute to the hon. Member for Twickenham, and probably to a public school education, but I do not know anyone else who can make the words "go", "through", and "queue" rhyme.

The calibre of speeches that we have heard recently suggests that the subject is not taken immensely seriously by the Government. I pay tribute to the Minister, as has been done earlier, for at least giving it the courtesy of a long and full speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I do not over-egg the pudding, but it was not bad. By the standards of what we heard later, it was the performance of a maestro.

Recent speeches have also demonstrated that the standard of Tory central office brief is not what it used to be. We heard several speeches that were based on the patently false premise that the Opposition are opposing the principle of public-private co-operation in extending investment in the London underground system. That is the antithesis of the truth. As I said in my opening speech, we might well not have needed this debate if the Minister and I had been able to sort things out between us and accept each other's words as our bonds. The problem that muddied the waters in advance of the debate was the fact that the deputy leader of Tory party, I mean the Deputy Prime Minister—he has so many titles, but that is not one of them—produced the statement that he wanted privatisation of the underground in the next Tory manifesto. I hear cluckings of agreement from Conservative Members.

To be fair to the Tories, virtually every hon. Member except the Minister has said today that it is a pity that the Bill would not privatise the underground, because they are all in favour. Some have gone further and said that they want the same franchising system for the underground as is being introduced for the railways. Others obviously want to separate the trains from the tracks. Opposition suspicions are, therefore, obviously justified.

Today, we have had an opportunity to explore the argument and to put down markers against the privatisation of the London underground system. I have not the slightest doubt that that view will be shared by the vast majority of people, not only in London but throughout the country. Just as some 90 per cent. of public opinion is opposed to rail privatisation, so 90 per cent. of public opinion would be opposed to the privatisation of London Underground, for all the excellent reasons that have been adduced by Opposition Members.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) gave us a little lesson in global economics and the way in which British capital is taking flight to build roads and railways everywhere in the world except Britain. That tells us more about the loyalties of British capital than about the Bill. If the hon. Member actually believes that if only the vehicle for public-private investment in infrastructure had existed, British capital would have been put into Britain instead, he must explain to us why the public-private initiative was launched only in 1994. Before then, contractors had plenty of business in this country and other parts of world on the basis that they were hired to do the job and were paid for the job. They performed a task—usually the construction phase of projects—and they were good at it.

Labour recognised quite some time before that there were possibilities in extending and harnessing the role of the private sector to bring capital in, not only to fulfil the contractor role, but to take some of the maintenance risk, as is only reasonable, and—on other less easy to define occasions—perhaps to take some operational risk. That principle has not been in dispute for some time in the Labour party, so it is a bit rich for the hon. Gentleman to give us lectures when the Government have been so belated in coming to that conclusion.

We had a more general discussion earlier about the merits of privatisation and some relevant examples were quoted. Since then, by pure coincidence, I have received a parliamentary reply, the contents of which I shall share briefly with the House. In preparation for the latest phase in the disposal of the family silver—Railtrack—I thought it would be a good idea to find out how much debt has been written off by the Government for each privatisation since 1979. I got the answer today. It is extraordinary.

Since 1979, £22.5 billion of debt has been written off by the Government to facilitate privatisation. We mentioned British Airways earlier. At today's prices, £347 million of debt was written off as a sweetener for the privatisation of British Airways. Frankly, if any business suddenly had £347 million of debt written off, it would find it an awful lot easier to make a profit—because it would not have to service the debt—than it did before the debt was cancelled.

It is quite a revelation to find that this Government, who plead parsimony on every other count, have written off a staggering £22.5488 billion in debt owed to the public purse to facilitate their privatisation programme. I wonder how much more debt will be written off to facilitate Railtrack's privatisation. If Conservative Members who have spoken today get their way, how much more will be written off to facilitate the privatisation of London Underground? Fortunately that will not happen because it cannot be done before the general election.

We often hear the great Tory masters and mistresses of finance talking about prudence with the public purse, and about how there is never enough money to spend on anything worth while, yet they are quite prepared to write off £22.5 billion of taxpayers' money to fulfil their political aim of privatisations that enrich those who have invested, but certainly not taxpayers. That is an extraordinary commentary on the values of the Government.

This has been an interesting debate which, although lighthearted at times, has had a serious purpose. It has given us the chance to discuss the underground system, and there have been knowledgeable speeches from hon. Members familiar with the subject. Of course one way of getting more money into the system is through the fare box. I know it is not fashionable nowadays to do so, but I want to pay tribute to the way the Greater London council operated public transport in London. At least some of its legacy survives, to the great benefit of the underground system.

In 1981, fares on the underground had reached their highest point in history. Owing to the introduction of the Fares Fair scheme, patronage of the underground soared to new heights. *[Interruption.]* If any Conservative Member wants to intervene and has the courage of his convictions, he can easily be accommodated.

Mr. Tim Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me so enthusiastically. Holding fares down artificially meant that the taxpayers of London had to foot the bill for rich tourists—that was my point.

Mr. Wilson: Reasonably priced public transport certainly attracts tourists, just as it attracts me. The Tories are ideologically blind; they never can recognise that there is a balance to be struck. Lower fares lead to greater use. Of course there is a point below which fares cannot be taken, but if they are too high, people are driven away from the service. Once the Government of the day—unfortunately they are still the Government—stepped in and forced the abolition of the Fares Fair scheme, patronage of the underground fell to its lowest level since the dark days of war in 1943. The underground has had to recover from that low point ever since.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) said, in her Madam Bountiful way, that the needy are already assisted by means of concessionary schemes. It is worth remembering that those schemes are paid for by the London boroughs—that is their political decision. They have had the political courage to do that because such a socially equalising charge makes it possible for people of various categories and income groups to use the underground system.

Even the existence of the travelcard is a legacy from the days of the GLC—and the Government cannot get rid of them, as part of their drive towards rail privatisation, because it would be so politically unpopular. The Tory idea running through these debates—that everything in the public sector is bad—is both bankrupt in terms of truth and dogmatically unreasonable. The electorate increasingly realise that. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith)—a good example of what I am talking about—cannot wait for the Chiltern line to be privatised. We heard a rant about the disastrous record of British Rail in the public sector. The Chiltern line attracts a great deal of interest in the private sector, unlike most British Rail franchises, because public investment has made it a first-class railway service that is run in the social interest. It is operated so that it can make a contribution to the overall finances of the railway.

If the Chiltern line, which has the potential to be profitable, is removed from the system and is converted into a profitable railway in the interests of private shareholders, that will be to the financial disadvantage of the rest of the network, much of which will still be in the public sector.

That is typical of the Government's approach to the public sector. It is all right, apparently, if the public sector provides moneys and creates assets. That having been done, the Government move in, write off the debt, sell the assets cheap and let the private sector milk the profits that have come from public sector finance.

I have referred to books that set out the history of the London underground system. I should explain that I am a great admirer of enterprise. Where would we be without the Victorians? The Victorians built the underground system, built the railways and created many wonderful public assets, which we still enjoy. Enterprise is a wonderful thing, as is vision. It is sad, however, that the Tories have diluted enterprise to the point at which they believe that it consists of stealing public assets and securing profits the taxpayer paid to create. That is the Tories' idea of enterprise.

Mr. Smith *rose—*

Mr. Wilson: I note that the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene.

If someone has paid for something and another person takes it away without paying, what is a better word for that than stealing? It seems not to be an unreasonable word in the circumstances. It is surely not a moral transaction to take the Chiltern line, for example, it having been paid for by the taxpayer, and convert it so as to make private profit, without any recompense to the taxpayer. If that is set as an example of enterprise against what genuine entrepreneurs did, what a pathetic bunch the Tories are today. The sadness and the tragedy for the United Kingdom is that a Government who have been in office for 17 years cannot appreciate what constitutes enterprise.

The Government have had it so easy for so long. There have been public assets to rip off for so long. It is only when the well runs dry that, it is to be hoped, someone will get round to the idea that part of the role of politicians is to stimulate and engender genuine enterprise to ensure that there is investment, rather than to take assets created by entrepreneurs in the public sector and dress them up with a self-congratulatory term such as private enterprise.

Mr. Smith: If the hon. Gentleman is so keen on public ownership, will he tell us how Railtrack would be taken back into public ownership by Labour?

Mr. Wilson: All will be revealed in due course. The hon. Gentleman is obviously in the know. Will he tell me whether there will be a golden share? Is there to be a sale of 51 per cent. or 100 per cent.? Perhaps he will tell me if it will be possible to sell Railtrack at all. After all, it is clearly a high-risk investment in every sense of that term.

[Mr. Wilson]

I return to London Underground. We shall not vote against the Bill. Instead, we shall vote for the Opposition amendment, which is on the Order Paper to demonstrate our support for the public-private concept, on which we have led the way and with which we find no ideological difficulty. We are talking all the time to those with whom we shall work to make public-private partnership projects come to fruition. Indeed, that is not an issue of division within the House because, to some extent, the Tories have caught up with us.

How can Tory Members be satisfied with the Government's record? Throughout London, lawyers' offices are full of documents—they are piled to the ceiling—setting out public-private partnership projects that have never come within 100 miles of being fulfilled because of the terms that the Government have set. Lawyers who work on such projects tell us what they think of the Tories and their version of the private finance initiative: they will speak of the frustration that is caused by negotiating endlessly on projects that never come about. They do not believe that the present Government have any commitment to the PFI. Unless it can satisfy their ideology by transferring all the risk—including the operational risk—to the private sector, the Government are not interested.

Throughout the genuinely entrepreneurial sphere, there is a real thirst for a Labour Government who will work with the private sector to make public-private partnership projects work to the benefit of the national infrastructure, and specifically to the benefit of London Underground.

9.45 pm

Mr. Norris: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is with a considerable sense of relief that I utter the immortal words, "This has been an interesting debate." We heard excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon), for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), and from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). We also heard extremely interesting speeches from my good friend the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) and from the hon. Members for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) and for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms)—and, of course, from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). Many of them made extremely kind personal remarks—albeit with a faint whiff of those old-fashioned obituaries that I fear I shall have to accustom myself to in the House.

I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet is present. He is a long-term supporter of London Transport. He made a germane point about Northern line trains: he said that it was extremely desirable for us to secure the new trains through the private finance initiative, at a gross contract cost of about £400 million, but expressed regret that they might not be delivered as quickly as we might have liked. I am advised that GEC Alsthom, which won the contract—

Ms Short: In Birmingham.

Mr. Norris: Indeed. I understand that GEC Alsthom is currently suffering from a delay in production. One of the key features of the contract that we have been able to negotiate with GEC Alsthom is that the delay will not simply result in further delay for London's taxpayers and passengers; GEC will have to pay a penalty to London taxpayers, in the form of a rebate of part of the price of the contract, in recognition of the fact that it was not prepared to start the contract on time.

I cast no aspersions in relation to possible reasons for the delay. No doubt there are perfectly good reasons for it. I merely make the point that it underlines the cardinal advantage of transferring that part of the risk to the private sector. For the first time, the contractor has a real stimulus to ensure that what is promised is delivered when it is asked for.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh was kind enough to refer to my election to the companionship of the Institution of Civil Engineers. I promised myself that I would get that into *Hansard* at least once before my retirement; I have done it now, so I can retire tonight a happy man. It was extremely kind of the hon. Gentleman to bother to mention it, and I was greatly honoured to receive it.

More to the point, I understood the hon. Gentleman's analysis and his points about a strategic London authority. I hope that he will accept that the creation in 1992 of a specific post in the Department of Transport to take a multi-modal overview of transport in the capital has been of value to London. The hon. Gentleman is right that it is impossible to consider these issues in a disaggregated way. We must have an integrated view of how services in the capital operate, but such a view does not imply that all services need be under one control or ownership. That is the wrong sort of integration. It leads to a sclerotic view of transport provision and to the sort of provision that for many years handicapped the development of the public transport service not only in London, but outside the capital.

I issue a word of caution to the hon. Gentleman. If he is saying, on behalf of his party, that he will fund crossrail, Thameslink 2000 and all the other expensive projects to which he referred, I should like him to say so and the House to be able to cost such a commitment. He asked me a simple question: does the Bill facilitate privatisation? I hope that, listening to the argument throughout the long debate, he has been convinced that the answer on that straightforward point is of course no.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North made the discreditable suggestion that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough might not be worth the fees that he is privileged to charge to his occasional clients. In an emergency, I would certainly turn to any hon. and learned Member who, with Madam Speaker herself in the Chair, could introduce the Market Harborough bypass and the channel tunnel rail link into a debate on London Regional Transport. He gave a brilliant exposition, stretching my credulity only when he asserted that he was too young to have known my noble Friend Lord Parkinson because that cannot conceivably have been the case.

My hon. and learned Friend touched a raw nerve in the Opposition by suggesting that the reasoned amendment might have been drafted by Mr. Jimmy Knapp rather than by the Labour party.

Ms Short: I drafted it.

Mr. Norris: If the hon. Lady says so, I accept that assertion.

My hon. and learned Friend touched on a point that is absolutely seminal to the debate. He pointed out how extraordinarily foolish it was to concentrate on who the employer of an individual might be, whatever function he was to discharge in the public service, without considering properly whether he was properly trained, qualified and equipped to do his job. That is what is important and Conservative Members have never lost sight of it because they are interested in practical solutions. It was significant that the Opposition should have drawn the distinction which led my hon. and learned Friend to make that point.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate, who represents the deepest station on the underground—192 ft down—said some kind personal words, but then lowered her normal high standards by asserting that the *Evening Standard* had referred to the system as the worst in the world. It was not the *Evening Standard* but, sadly, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) in a petulant and intemperate outburst which was immediately contradicted by informed Members on both sides of the House.

The Healey and Baker survey of international world cities establishes the relative worth of a number of characteristics which determine the quality of life in great cities. It concludes that, among the major cities in every continent included in the survey, London had the best public transport system.

Ms Short: Better than Paris?

Mr. Norris: Better than Paris. I know that the hon. Lady has not been in her job long. I recommend that she obtain a copy of that survey, which could make extremely embarrassing reading for the Labour party, and I caution her not to make statements about the paucity of provision in London before reading that objective assessment of the quality of the system.

Mr. Wilson *rose—*

Mr. Norris: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue, if I may.

Ms Glenda Jackson *rose—*

Mr. Norris: I will give way to the hon. Lady as I am quoting her.

Ms Jackson: I am grateful to the Minister for pointing out my error. Does he agree that although the opinion did not begin in the *Evening Standard*, the newspaper certainly splashed it in banner headlines over that evening's edition, so it was clearly a view with which the newspaper probably agreed?

Mr. Norris: Stewart Steven, when he was editor of the *Evening Standard*, told me when I complained to him about the mild petulance of one of his editorials:

> "Steve, my entire readership is hanging from a strap on your system when they read my paper. If I tell them what I know to be the case, which is that it is the best system in the world, they will never believe me and, more to the point, they will never buy my paper."

I have always admired Mr. Steven—he is an excellent journalist and he was a superb editor of an always readable paper—but I let him make his headlines in his own way.

The important point is that I am determined to ensure that we base our opinions on objective evidence. I am not in the business of decrying London or its transport system because it is important to establish London not only as the finest city in the world, which it is beyond peradventure, but as the city with the best international links to and from it—that, too, was a conclusion of the survey—and the best transport links within it. That is the reality, and Labour Members would do well to remember it. They should also not be quite so free in their denigration of London. It ill behoves hon. Members, many of whom represent London seats, to degrade the reputation of what is in fact one of our greatest national assets.

I want to make a technical point. The hon. Lady mentioned pumping, and she was right: there is a huge operation on the underground which daily pumps out the millions of gallons of water which comes into the system, as it does into any subterranean structure. The hon. Lady said that because of the rising water table in London the problem is likely to become worse and then suggested that, because it would not be possible to stick an advertising hoarding down the side of such a pump, the private sector would somehow not be interested. She misses the point. There is every virtue in taking such an operation and ensuring that it is put out to public tender so that we can see whether the private sector might be able to perform that vital role on behalf of London Underground in a more efficient and less expensive way than London Transport is currently able to do. Hon. Members do not have to rely on my words, because that is exactly the attitude that London Transport takes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East, in his interesting speech, referred to the subject of fares. I pay tribute to the former Greater London council, which was far-sighted in introducing the travelcard. My hon. Friend was right to say that that has been of lasting benefit to Londoners and I am delighted to confirm that, as ever, it remains central to our ticketing policy. I fear, however, that my hon. Friend was quite wrong in what he said about the consequences of the Fares Fair policy. I have never denigrated the ambitions of those who introduced that policy, who no doubt believed that such a policy would result in improved ridership and reduced congestion. It did the former, but not the latter. The tragedy is that the additional journeys made on the underground were by people who were not transferring from cars: they were simply additional riders.

My hon. Friend was right to say that the consequence of a great lowering of fares on the underground is that the major recipients are the millions of Londoners who already use the system. They will no doubt be grateful. However, if we are looking for an efficient use of public funds, that is not the way to go about it.

The Bill is a modest measure—a limited but important one, which while not affecting the fundamental role of London Transport will enable it more effectively to harness the talents, skills, enterprise and finance of the private sector in a way that any sensible Londoner will wish to encourage.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 154, Noes 185.

Division No. 76] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Brown, N *(N'cstle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge HT)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Randall, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ruddock, Joan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Eric Martlew.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bereaford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Day, Stephen
Devaa, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Ellerton, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Birm'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mills, Iain
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael

Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexleyheath)*
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT BILL
[*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the London Regional Transport Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions in relation to the Welfare Food Scheme) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 19th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

WORKER INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 11954/95, relating to worker information and consultation; and supports the Government's view that any extension of the existing Community requirements on worker information and consultation is unnecessary and undesirable.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Tower Blocks (Southampton)

10.12 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I wish to present to the House three petitions from the residents of three high-rise council blocks in Southampton. They asked me personally to bring them to the House because they feel that they are not being considered by Southampton city council and they were stunned by the council's decision not to remove asbestos from their blocks of flats but to paint over the asbestos. In the three blocks, there must be about 200 children. There are certainly nearly 400 signatures from the various families.

The danger of asbestos is well known to everyone. Therefore I ask the House—that means the Department of the Environment—to look into the matter. Southampton city council has admitted that the safety of its residents is always a prime concern, and has said that it will appoint an independent analyst in the near future. Whether that will happen or not, I do not know, but the whole structure of the housing committee and the debates that have taken place lead me to be concerned about the wishes of the tenants, who will have to remain in their accommodation while people in protective clothing go around trying to neutralise the asbestos. A threat is posed to the life of anyone who is in contact with that terrible fibre, which will obviously be in the air while the work is carried out.

The three blocks concerned are Sturminster house, Albion towers and Shirley towers, all in the city of Southampton. I well remember those blocks, because when I became chairman of the housing committee in Southampton, we decided that the construction of those blocks ought to be stopped. Unfortunately, they had been partly completed, so the work had to be finished.

The humble petition states:

That asbestos has been discovered in the structure of the buildings

That the City Council is proposing not to remove this asbestos, but only to seal it in its place;

That we fear for the health of ourselves and especially our children if this asbestos is not properly removed.

Wherefore your Petitioners humbly pray that your honourable House will take what measures lie in its power to ensure that we, and other residents of council-owned property, are given all possible protection.

I have three petitions and with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to put them in the petition bag.

To lie upon the Table.

Royal Ordnance (Chorley)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

10.16 pm

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): It gives me great pleasure to highlight the need for an enterprise zone at Royal Ordnance, Chorley.

In the past 17 years, this Conservative Government have displayed a tremendous vision for the enterprise economy, which has shown itself in our economic performance, particularly in the past two years. Those Government policies have comprised the creation of urban development corporations and enterprise zones. They have ensured that new ideas have flourished and new enterprises have been set up around the country. We have prime examples of that success in the Metro centre in the north-east, by Newcastle, and the Merry Hill centre in the west midlands. I venture to suggest that there would have been nowhere near that investment and retail expansion in those areas without enterprise zones.

Similarly, just 20 miles from Chorley, the Central Manchester development corporation has revitalised huge areas of what was a decaying city, and the Trafford Park development corporation has done a marvellous job on a clapped-out old industrial park.

In the past two years, I have raised the need for an enterprise zone on a number of occasions—first with the Prime Minister, whose answer on 22 February was interesting. On that occasion, I said that I welcomed the latest plans for enterprise zones to be established in areas where coal mining was running down and labour opportunities were diminishing, and I called for those zones in areas such as Chorley.

The Prime Minister recognised that enterprise zones had been successful, and said:

"In areas that face particular difficulties because of substantial job losses, perhaps because of the collapse of a single employer or industry, we look across the board to see what help can be given. Enterprise zones are an important part of that, but not necessarily the whole of it."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1994; Vol. 238, c. 143.]

The basis of tonight's debate is to examine the various alternatives open for the regeneration of the Royal Ordnance site at Chorley, which has suffered massive job losses.

The owner of the site, Royal Ordnance, is a wholly owned subsidiary of British Aerospace, which is a first-class employer in the defence industry throughout the north-west and the rest of the country.

The whole 900-acre site is contaminated by munitions. It was used for the filling of shells and all sorts of bombs and other ammunition for many years. Three quarters of the site is in Chorley borough council and one quarter in South Ribble borough council. I welcome the presence of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), who wants to add a few comments at the end of my speech.

The site has always had direct rail access. It is directly between the M6 and M61 motorways, so, while it needs decontamination and much infrastructure, it is a strategic site that would have first-class communications.

Since the war, when there were 30,000 munitions workers on the site, there has been a dramatic fall in the amount of labour employed. It was down to 6,000 or 7,000 about 20 years ago, and there are now only 100 production workers. We have the headquarters of Royal Ordnance, and I welcome the fact that there are 350 white-collar workers on the site. They are located on the southern perimeter, on one of the roads.

Enterprise zones have been designated in the past few years in Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire and Durham. I am anxious, because of the peace dividend and the rundown of defence jobs, to fight the cause for enterprise zones in areas that have suffered from the dramatic fall in the number of defence jobs. That affects not only Chorley and the north-west but the whole country.

The advantages of enterprise zones are tremendous. There is a 10-year period without business rates and 100 per cent. capital allowance for people investing in the area; and they are basically planning-free zones, unless the use of toxic chemicals is involved. People generally have a free hand.

The sort of development that I, Royal Ordnance and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble would like would involve mixed uses. We want a reasonable amount of residential development, but of the right sort—for buyers from our area, not for incomers. We want a business park that would include manufacturing, light industry and offices. It would have some retail content, but the main aim is not a retail investment such as the Metro Centre or Merry Hill.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy has played a part in ensuring that we get Konver funding from Europe. That ensures that we can change from defence manufacture towards civil production, and get a commercial business centre started. So far, it has been only small fry. That is why we need the massive injection that we would get from an enterprise zone.

What are the alternatives to an enterprise zone? In our area, unemployment is below 5 per cent., and we have no chance of getting assisted area status. We would need an unemployment rate of 15 or 18 per cent. or even higher. I welcome the fact that we do not have that. I like to think that much of that results from my efforts and those of other Conservative Members in the area, who have kept unemployment in Lancashire lower than in the rest of the region or the nation.

We have put in single regeneration budget bids in the first two rounds. The Government office in Manchester gave us a no-no in each case. I am not hopeful about rounds three and four, and there will be less money available in the rounds to come.

English Partnerships has been helpful, but it has been charged with redeveloping brown-field sites throughout the United Kingdom. It has a massive task, which will need not hundreds of millions, but billions, of pounds to redevelop all available sites. It is spoilt for choice, but it has been very helpful. Some investigations are going on at the moment, and I applaud it for playing its part. Frankly, this site will not be developed for decades unless we have a designated enterprise zone.

I have already paid tribute to Trafford Park and Central Manchester. They have done wonders in the north-west. Royal Ordnance has put in for planning permission on a mixed-use basis, and it hopes that the two local authorities will play their part so that it can do full viability studies. I am not hopeful that we can see our way ahead.

Two years ago, I led a deputation from the two local authorities to meet the then Minister, who is now my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. He made constructive comments, but said two things. First, he said that it was not necessarily the right way ahead, and that we must examine all possible alternatives. The Minister had been advised by his civil servants that there was little or no chance of securing European Union approval.

Following the deputation, on 18 April my right hon. Friend wrote a letter in which he said:

"I promised to write to clarify the European Union position regarding the designation of Enterprise Zones. My officials have spoken with our representative in Brussels (UKREP) who confirm that the Commission's position remains that Enterprise Zones are extremely unlikely to be approved if located outside Assisted Areas. Of course, under the Treaty of Rome, the UK is able to notify the Commission of a proposal to designate a zone outside an Assisted Area, but the unambiguous advice from Brussels is that the Commission will reject any such proposal".

We have only to look at the events of the past week to see that the Commission always wants its own way.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble and I are here this evening to champion the cause of an enterprise zone. Article 92, section 3 of the treaty of Rome, under the heading "Aids Granted by States", says:

"The following may be considered to be compatible with the common market:

(b) aid to promote the execution of an important project of common European interest or to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State".

That article could be applied to defence industries, not only in this country but in other member states. A submission could be made, and the European Union would then make a decision—and I would fight it all the way.

I ask that Royal Ordnance, as the landowner, and the two local authorities, which support the concept of an enterprise zone, be allowed to fill in the necessary forms and make out their case. We could then examine that and other alternatives to see what may be done.

I raised the matter in the Environment Select Committee hearing of 19 July 1995 with my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). In answer to my query about the possibility of a designated enterprise zone within the European Union, he replied:

"There are really two aspects to this. The first is, does the European Union allow it; the answer is yes but the conditions are very severe and it takes an interminable time to deliver one . . . it is because there are a great deal of conditions to fulfil, there are activities which have got to be excluded from an enterprise zone and there are contracts which have got to be signed with umpteen people in order to deliver them. With the best will in the world, we are talking about years, not months, to get an enterprise zone from zero to operation. So that is the first answer. The second answer is there is a real issue about whether enterprise zones are the most effective answer; whether or not they do, to some extent, divert investment, while in this long period of getting it up and running whether, in fact, investment is deferred as well as distorted. So I have to tell you that my own view is that I do not say 'I never want to see another enterprise zone', but I would want to make sure I had explored every other avenue before I would say that an enterprise zone seemed to me the right route to go down."

I argue that it is the right route and that we should have the chance to bid for it. I am convinced that the process will take years, but the site has lain stagnant for 10 or 20 years, and something must be done: the blot on the landscape must be removed. I am sure that many jobs can be attracted to the area, and I look forward to being allowed to pursue the case for an enterprise zone.

10.27 pm

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) for allowing me to make a brief contribution to the debate. He has laboured long and hard—as long as he has been a Member of Parliament—to have the site's importance recognised. We had hoped that the British Aerospace takeover of Royal Ordnance would ensure the continuation of employment on the site, but that was not to be.

As my hon. Friend said, it is a substantial site, of which a small proportion is in my constituency. I have followed my hon. Friend's lead in going from pillar to post in putting the case for an enterprise zone. I was an Environment Minister when my hon. Friend led a delegation to meet Department of the Environment officials, and he understood that I was not able to be present on that occasion.

My hon. Friend the Minister will recall our travails in Committee when considering the Environment Agency legislation. We examined the problems of contaminated land and what could be done to retrieve such sites into the development cycle. This is a case in point: we are looking to attract industry to that substantial site and to create jobs.

While the South Ribble borough council and Chorley have some differences about a number of suitable sites in the area, this site could be used to create jobs and attract industry—particularly high-tech industry, which would help to recover some of the costs associated with remediating the contaminated land.

It would not be acceptable to house residents from, say, Preston on the site—as is being proposed by the county council and by others. We want to see a mixed development of industry—predominantly in a nice high-technology environment—on the site. If housing or recreational facilities could be put on the site as well, so be it. In essence, we are looking for industry and we are looking for jobs.

I ask the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to do what he can to meet the concerns of my hon. Friend, who is pressing for enterprise zone status—and I have joined him in supporting the principle of wanting more industry on the site. I ask him to give an undertaking this evening to review the options and to consider what might be done in the best interests of Chorely and South Ribble. Having done that carefully, he could then advise us what can be done along the lines that we have been pressing.

10.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) and to his right hon. assistant the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) for raising the issues surrounding the site. It is interesting and fascinating. Both my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend have been battling with this issue, with much energy, for a considerable time. I agree that we need to make every effort in this area, and in other areas like it, and use such sites productively. I applaud the point made by my right hon. Friend about the productive use of the site.

However, we have to accept that there is a scale to the task which means that it will inevitably have to have a slower track than has been followed in some other cases.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

As my hon. Friend has demonstrated, the Royal Ordnance site is complex and difficult: there are some 1,500 buildings of various types, roads, distribution areas, open spaces, test areas and dumping grounds. Hon. Members will appreciate that a site of this size—some 300 hectares: from my back of the envelope mathematics, approximately a square mile—is not only large but diverse. Therefore, there is not one single approach or means of tackling it.

I believe that an enterprise zone on such a complex site would be counter-productive—the area does not have high unemployment relative to some other areas. An enterprise zone, and an enterprise zone alone, would, to my mind, stifle investment in the area—while everyone in the industry waited to see whether it came forward, and while we tried to explain to Brussels why we should have such a site. It is quite clear from the answer that my hon. Friend has received that it is unlikely that we will obtain such permission.

In the early 1980s, a number of sites were designated as enterprise zones on an experimental basis, and they had a relatively high cost compared to some of the other methods. In December 1987, we announced that the enterprise zone scheme would not be extended unless there were exceptional circumstances—as was the case with the eight enterprise zones designated since that time. Each one was in response to a sudden major impact on industry caused by a closure of a traditional heavy industry—shipbuilding, steel making or coal mining. I concede that there is a parallel that one could make in this area from the Royal Ordnance.

This area of Chorley does not have a poor economy. In fact, it has a vibrant and wider economy—which would considerably complicate matters when we tried to get permission from Brussels. As my hon. Friend said, it has been made clear that a new enterprise zone, located outside an assisted area, would be resisted—to put it mildly.

I have, as my right hon. and hon. Friends know, asked the officials in the Department to work closely with the local authorities, and particularly with English Partnerships, to consider a range of options available for tackling the site.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley knows, English Partnerships has recognised the site's economic potential and significance. Substantial work has been done already to investigate the potential of the Royal Ordnance site, targeted specifically at prospects for its redevelopment and rejuvenation.

My right hon. and hon. Friends will be aware of the study carried out by the consultants at the end of 1994. That aimed to formulate a strategic framework for the complementary regeneration of several major brown-field sites in the area, including the Royal Ordnance site at Euxton. Its conclusion was that this was a flagship site of significant potential for a major role in the regeneration and economic growth of the region.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley may also know that, in December 1993, under the Konver I Community initiative, a grant of £446,400 was awarded to Chorley business and technology centre towards a project at the Royal Ordnance factory site. The grant covered four elements—preparatory work for a future scheme; surveys of the 60 hectares; a feasibility study for a soil bio-remediation centre; and creation of a manufacturing facility. I understand that the organisation has successfully provided workshop space on the Royal Ordnance site to assist small companies in need of new premises.

More recently, a working group has been set up to bring together the key local players, especially representatives from the two borough councils with a shared interest in the site. The site straddles the boundary between the two borough councils, Chorley and South Ribble, as has been explained. My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley will be aware of the two local plans for these, which propose a mixture of housing and employment areas and open spaces.

Based on those local plans, as they stand, the split is likely to be in the region of 10 per cent. for housing, 50 per cent. for employment and 40 per cent. for open space. That remains to be confirmed, as the local plans are still being debated, but I am sure that those provisional splits will go some way to reassuring my hon. Friend, and particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble, that careful consideration is being given to achieving a balanced mix of uses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley may be aware that an investigation of the site and building conditions has been undertaken in two phases, predominantly because of the size and the costs involved. The first phase, covering an area of 82 hectares, has been completed at a cost of £250,000, partially met by Konver assistance. The second phase, which is currently under way, will cost around £470,000. Again, part is to be met by Konver II, part by Royal Ordnance, and English Partnerships has agreed to contribute £118,000. That is substantial support, helping to speed up the process.

The important work is due to be completed by summer this year. English Partnerships and Royal Ordnance are in agreement that further progress is dependent on the findings and the recommendations. That is a sensible way forward. Once the site report is available, it will be possible for the various bodies involved to work out in more detail the joint approach. As I have said, there are more than 300 hectares to attack, and it is realistic to plan for phases over a number of years. There can be no quick fixes on a site as complex and as large as this.

Much is currently going on behind the scenes. Neither the private nor the public sector will invest in the site until we have a clear idea of what needs to be done to clean and clear the area. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble will understand that, having piloted the Environment Act 1995 through some of its stages, predominantly its Committee stage.

I should like to suggest an alternative approach to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley, who may wish to take it up with the local authorities. A part of the Royal Ordnance site could be designated as a simplified planning zone. That would have the effect of granting full planning permission for specified types of development, in advance of the precise development proposal being worked up. My hon. Friend may be aware that that is similar to the simplified planning procedures which operate within an enterprise zone, without all the long-drawn-out procedures.

The kinds of developments concerned, together with any conditions or limitations attached to them, are set out in the scheme which lasts for 10 years once adopted.

Developers are able to act in the knowledge that development specified in the scheme will be permitted, so they can go ahead without needing to go through the performance of a planning application. That removes one of the more bureaucratic drags on development that some local authorities impose.

To conclude, I must say that I am very impressed by the painstaking approach taken towards the planned development of the Royal Ordnance factory site. My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley will agree that our resources need to be used wisely, and that we need to ensure that we obtain the outcome we wish to see, and that we get a clean and attractive site as promptly as reasonably possible. That is why I think that the procedure we are adopting now is preferable to the long-drawn-out, somewhat hazardous approach of an enterprise zone, which my hon. Friend has suggested.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 March 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of Westminster Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed) and shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means, who shall make such Amendments thereto as were made by him in the last Session, and shall report the Bill as amended to the House forthwith, and the Bill, so amended, shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered again upon Wednesday 20 March at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Magazines (Teenage Girls)

1. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what meetings he has held with the publishers of magazines for teenage girls to discuss a code of conduct for their publications; and if he will make a statement. [18982]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): I recently met representatives of magazine publishers and retailers to discuss the widely expressed concerns about the suitability for young people of the material contained in some magazines for teenage girls.

The publishers and retailers agreed to set up a working party which would draw up guidelines to deal with this problem. I look forward to receiving its proposals.

Mr. Luff: On a day when the innocence of childhood is inevitably at the forefront of all our minds, may I thank my hon. Friend sincerely for the robust and tough position that he has taken in discussions with the publishers? May I urge him to continue in that vein? Does he agree that their claims merely to be offering information to young teenage girls are, at best, disingenuous, and that in reality they are using sex to boost sales?

Mr. Sackville: I thank my hon. Friend for what he said. The more that I have learnt about the subject since he introduced the Periodicals (Protection of Children) Bill, the more I have realised that, whatever agony aunts and others may say, the material in question is not merely a sex education service. Sex is being used to make money, unfortunately in this instance at the expense of the innocence of children and young people. I think that my hon. Friend did us all a service in introducing his Bill and highlighting another area in which standards of public decency and morality are falling.

Fire Service

2. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he plans to take to ensure that the fire service is adequately resourced. [18983]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): The financial provision for fire brigades is decided by fire authorities. They are obliged to set budgets which will enable them to comply with their statutory duties under the Fire Services Act 1947. Total finance available to local authorities for 1996-97 will increase by 3.3 per cent. over 1995-96.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Home Secretary aware that the Chief Fire Officers Association has taken the unprecedented step of writing to all Members complaining about a shortfall of over £80 million between the current expenditure of the fire service and the formal allocations as expressed in the revenue support grant? The Fire Brigades Union has consequently warned of a crisis whereby the fire brigades will be unable to meet their statutory minimum standards of firefighting, rescue and other emergency services. Will the Government intervene to ensure that the fire service is given adequate resources, bearing it in mind that Government negligence could be putting lives at risk?

Mr. Howard: The 3.3 per cent. increase in finance that will be available to local authorities in the next financial year is clearly sufficient to enable proper provision to be made for fire authorities and for the fire service. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the Audit Commission, in its report on the fire service, found that savings of up to £67 million a year—that is 5 per cent. of total expenditure on the service—could be saved if efficiency improvements were made.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: I recognise the increased funding to the fire services and the fact that there could be increased efficiency, but will my right hon. and learned

Friend accept that there is a resourcing problem, based on the cost of future pension provision? The structure needs to be examined to ensure that more and more finance will go directly to help fighting fires rather than to paying for pensions. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider that and return to the House with his response?

Mr. Howard: We have indeed considered that. It was as a consequence of the requirement to fund pensions that special extra provision was made for the financing of pensions in this year's settlement. Cheshire county council has a 3.1 per cent. increase in its overall budget in 1996-97 as compared to 1995-96, and I believe that that enables it to make provision for funding its fire service.

Nationality Legislation

3. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend nationality legislation to allow the transmission of citizenship to the grandchildren of British citizens; and if he will make a statement. [18984]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): None. We remain of the view that, as a general rule, British citizenship should not be transmitted beyond the first generation born abroad.

Mr. MacShane: I am disappointed by that response. I am raising this issue on behalf of the many hundreds of thousands, if not now millions, of British citizens who work and live overseas. If they have children, those children are British, but if they, in turn, live abroad and have children, nationality will not be transmitted to the grandchildren of the first generation, save by grace and favour on the part of the Home Secretary. That situation is causing real concern. We have asylum problems, and there does have to be a cut-off, but the grandchildren of British citizens should be allowed to remain British.

Mr. Kirkhope: The position—as it was deemed right by the House in the 1970s, and supported by the Labour party in its Green Paper—is that citizenship should be a mixture of rights and duties, that there should be some commitment on the part of those who seek to acquire it and that there must be some concern and interest with the country of their choice. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I am not able to give him the assurances that he is seeking, but, as he knows, there are certain exceptions to the rule. If he has an individual case that he would like me to consider, I should be pleased to do so.

Sir Donald Thompson: None the less, will my hon. Friend ensure that people who work abroad are made aware of the position? My first grandson was born this week. His mother went to considerable trouble to come home from Spain to ensure that he was born here so that a problem would not arise when his—Edward Thompson's—children come to be born, perhaps somewhere else in the world. It is incumbent on us to ensure that British people working abroad should go to as much trouble as necessary to come here to have their children.

Mr. Kirkhope: I fully accept what my hon. Friend says. Certainly in his own family's case, the necessary actions were taken to ensure that citizenship would pass to the children. We look sympathetically at cases involving people who work—particularly in the interests of this country—abroad.

Doncaster and Buckley Hall Prisons

4. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on LEK Partnership's conclusions in respect of HMP Doncaster and HMP Buckley Hall and their public comparator group. [18985]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): The study by LEK evaluated the costs of private sector prisons with the most nearly comparable public sector prisons on 1993-94 data. The results showed that the cost per place was 21 per cent. lower for Doncaster and 26 per cent. lower for Buckley Hall than for comparable public sector prisons. The Prison Service has commissioned Coopers and Lybrand to update the study using 1994-95 data. I expect to have the findings by the end of this month.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Minister acknowledge, on the evidence that has been provided by her Department, that private prison costs—per year, per prisoner—are £200 more than costs for Prison Service accommodation? When will she realise that she should scrap the privatisation of prisons and return to the use of state prisons?

Miss Widdecombe: Let me try to help the hon. Gentleman out of his confusion. He is quite wrong in the interpretation that he has given to the House. The costs that he quotes for public sector prisons do not take account of significant costs that the Prison Service meets centrally, such as clothing, equipment, materials, uniforms and training. Furthermore, those figures, which were based on 1994-95 data, do not take account of the high start-up costs in the private sector.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very strange that when private prisons, on a like-for-like basis, are cheaper and private escort agencies are very much cheaper than the service that is provided by the state, the Labour party still wants to have everything done by the state rather than by the private sector? May we have an assurance that the new prisons referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend a few weeks ago will be provided by the private sector and not by the state sector?

Miss Widdecombe: I can indeed confirm that the prisons that my right hon. and learned Friend announced will be financed through the private finance initiative. My hon. Friend is right to say that it is extraordinary that, when all the advantages lie with the private sector, the Opposition still say on ideological grounds that privatisation is not working. Privatisation was found to work by many studies and was recommended by General Learmont when he conducted his studies. People who have been to Blakenhurst, including Lord Longford,

have praised that prison. There is uniform recognition that such prisons have added to the richness of prison life and are doing a good job at a decent cost—

Mr. Straw: Regimes.

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, regimes are part of the richness of prison life. The shadow Home Secretary clearly thinks it is funny when we talk about constructive activity. He thinks that education and work for prisoners is funny. That shows how serious the Opposition are about anything at all.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister aware that there has been a catalogue of errors and blunders at Buckley Hall prison in Rochdale? It seems to have a far worse record than other category C prisons. For example, 10 prisoners have not returned from authorised leave, and one ex-inmate described it as a time-bomb ticking away. Will the Minister instigate a full inquiry into the running of Buckley Hall by Group 4?

Miss Widdecombe: Buckley Hall performs well in a number of spheres and should be praised for that, but the hon. Lady is right to draw attention to particular concerns that have been expressed, and that the Prison Service is now investigating.

Mr. George Howarth: I shall take this slowly, so that we all understand. Will the Minister confirm that she has argued, on previous occasions and again today, that the 13.3 per cent. cuts proposed in the Prison Service over the next three years can be made from savings resulting from privatisation? Indeed, the Home Secretary has argued the same case. Will the Minister now admit that the truth, which has been confirmed in parliamentary answers from her Department via the Prison Service, is that, when like is compared with like, it costs £200 a year more to keep a prisoner in a privatised prison? Will she admit that what she said previously and her earlier answer today are wrong, and will she now tell the House how she is going to make 13.3 per cent. cuts over the next three years when all the evidence is that privatised prisons are a dearer option?

Miss Widdecombe: First, we have never said that all those savings will come from the private sector alone. We expect efficiency savings to be made across the Prison Service as a whole. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman spoke very slowly, but I think that he was waiting for his own understanding to catch up with him. I made it abundantly clear in my answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) that the particular figures that he quoted were not strictly comparable precisely because there are costs taken into account in one which are not taken into account in the other.

Police (New Technology)

6. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to fund developments in new technology to free police officers from paperwork and administrative duties. [18987]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): The development of new technology for the police service is one of my highest priorities and resources are being provided accordingly. The private finance initiative has a major part to play in bringing forward new systems which will streamline the administrative burden on the police.

Mr. Tipping: Is this not a Government who have piled one lot of paperwork on top of another through successive Criminal Justice Acts? Is this not a Government who have cut the number of police officers by 186 between September 1992 and March 1995? Is this not a Government who plan to cut capital expenditure next year by £23 million? Are those not prime examples of the Government saying one thing but doing another?

Mr. Maclean: That was a prime example of an hon. Member being handed a question which he did not understand and reading it out verbatim. If he bothers to look at the facts, he will find that we are revolutionising police work by new systems—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] If the hon. Gentleman bothers to look at the facts, he will see that we are revolutionising police work by the introduction of the new national automated fingerprint identification system, NAFIS, costing £100 million; of the Phoenix police national computer, also at enormous cost; and of the new digital radio systems for the police, on which development work is proceeding apace, which will cost about £500 million. All in all, we have spent £750 million on police technology during the past five years and we expect to spend the same during the next five years.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that detailed and helpful response to the original question. Does he accept that closed circuit television is also a new technology, the installation of which in town centres can be of immense benefit to the police in reducing and deterring crime? Will my right hon. Friend consider sympathetically an application that is shortly to be submitted to his Department by Macclesfield borough council and the Cheshire constabulary for the installation of closed circuit television in Macclesfield, a development that is widely supported by retailers, local people and their Member of Parliament?

Mr. Maclean: The people of Macclesfield have no better advocate for their CCTV system than my hon. Friend. We are not just sympathetic to CCTV technology; we have positively encouraged it, with the £5 million of taxpayers' money that we put into the scheme last year and the £15 million that we are putting into it this year. With the future promises of expenditure on CCTV, we believe that we can have a further 10,000 CCTV cameras around Britain.

Mr. Winterton: And in Macclesfield?

Mr. Maclean: We shall consider carefully all applications, including that from Macclesfield, and the hundreds of others that I expect to receive.

Immigration

7. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received from the Foreign Secretary his decision supporting India as a candidate for designation as a country where there is in general no serious risk of persecution. [18988]

Miss Widdecombe: It is not the practice to disclose ministerial correspondence between Departments, but I can confirm that the proposal to designate India and the other six countries, to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred on Second Reading of the Asylum and Immigration Bill, represents the joint view of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Madden: Is it not extraordinary that the Government are so reluctant to reveal when the Foreign Secretary confirmed that India was to be a candidate for designation and that the Home Office and the Foreign Office have still not published the information on which that decision has been taken? Bearing in mind the reports of Amnesty International and Asia Watch that systematic and serious human rights violations are taking place in virtually every state in the Indian union, a popular insurrection has been under way in Kashmir since 1990 and serious human rights violations take place on an almost daily basis in Punjab, is that not an extraordinary scenario, in which neither the Home Secretary nor the Foreign Secretary can say that this is a country where there is no general risk of persecution?

Miss Widdecombe: It has never been the case that where a country is declared to be generally safe, we say that there is therefore no risk whatever to any individual within that country. We have made it clear, and I should like to make it clear again, that individual applications for asylum will be treated on their merits and that it will not be the case that, just because an applicant comes from a designated country, the application will therefore be refused in every circumstance. Even at the moment, from those countries from which we refuse a high percentage of applications—98 to 99 per cent.—a small number still get through. We would not expect that position to change.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, while those who have a good case for asylum—even though their country is on the designated list—will be received into Britain as, rightly, they always have been, many of my constituents with ties and family in India will greatly resent the inference of the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) that India is not a friendly, democratic country and one with which we should have good relations?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I can only echo what he said. The designated list is designed to enable us to deal with countries that produce a large number of applications, of which a large percentage are found to be without foundation, and which are generally recognised as safe. That does not—I say this again because I do not want any misunderstanding on this point—negate the individual claimant's right to have his or her claim fully and properly considered.

Mr. Khabra: I fully understand the concerns, rattlings and prejudice of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) about the Indian situation. Does the Minister agree that Pakistan's treatment of minorities is worse—the country that my hon. Friend blindly supports?

Miss Widdecombe: I can only repeat that if individuals from Pakistan, India or any other country on the list can make a case that shows that they individually have a well-founded fear of persecution, they will be looked after according to our time-honoured tradition of being a haven.

Crime Prevention Initiatives

8. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking to improve the co-ordination and promotion of crime prevention initiatives. [18989]

Mr. Maclean: A new Crime Prevention Agency has been set up to promote the co-ordination of crime prevention strategy and the effective delivery of crime prevention initiatives on the ground where it really matters.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Minister agree that, although it is essential that no effort is spared in catching and bringing criminals to justice, crime prevention is still very important? Is he aware that in King's Lynn a comprehensive CCTV scheme is now in place and that it has already had a remarkable impact in reducing crime? Will he join me in paying tribute to the borough council, the police and local business men who got the scheme off the ground? Further to the characteristically robust question that was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), I suggest that he contacts the borough council in King's Lynn to find out how it is done.

Mr. Maclean: The last suggestion of my hon. Friend might be rather dangerous. Our hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) does not need to do that; he can get the Home Office guide, which we have helpfully produced so that all who wish to install CCTV can see how it is done. I believe that it quotes the example of King's Lynn, which is famous for its success in CCTV. Of course, CCTV is not only in King's Lynn but in Fakenham, Norwich, Breckland and the Breckland five towns of Thetford, Dereham, Attleborough, Swaffham and Watton.

We are not pushing ahead with just CCTV. Crime prevention is crucial. The Crime Prevention Agency is pushing ahead with initiatives on secured car parks and initiatives to reduce car crime, lorry theft and theft of heavy plant and equipment, and is looking at all aspects of technology in the fight against crime.

Mr. Cohen: Is it not time to tighten up with stringent mental health and suitability checks before any application for a gun licence is approved?

Mr. Maclean: We should first wait to find out the full facts before any hon. Member jumps to conclusions about what the solutions may be in future. All I can say, judging by the information that I have had so far—we should

await the statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland today—and having looked at the recommendations of the Firearms Consultative Committee, is that I have not seen anything that could have prevented yesterday's tragedy. All of us, as legislators and politicians, should be humble enough to accept that some things may be beyond our ability to solve or control.

Dame Jill Knight: May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that on top of all the very important initiatives that have already been placed on record by the Home Secretary, it is also important to have one more try with the BBC, with those who produce films and videos and, in particular, those who license them, because there seems no doubt that they have a copy-cat effect in many cases? May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that the film "Natural Born Killers" should not just be temporarily placed back but be put in the waste bin for ever?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend has made a characteristically correct point, which the House should consider carefully. Comment overnight has tended to focus on weapons and their availability and use, but perhaps we should also look at the beginning of the cycle, and ask what makes someone want to commit such an act in the first place. I have read in history books that many people returned from the first and second world wars with a lot of weapons, but only in the past 20 years, during which films and television have shown violence of this nature, have such incidents taken place.

Again, however, it may be dangerous for us to speculate in that way until the facts have been fully established. For the moment, I prefer to console the bereaved, and to offer them our sincere condolences, and our prayer that they may one day discover peace.

Causes of Crime (Research)

9. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research his Department has evaluated on the correlation between social and economic conditions and crime. [18990]

Mr. Howard: A wide range of Government and independent studies on that subject have been evaluated by my Department, including recently published Home Office research by Graham and Bowling into why some young people commit crime.

Mr. Prentice: Is there not a close and direct correlation between unemployment, especially youth unemployment, and crime, notably violent crime—a correlation that Conservative Members have consistently denied? If I am wrong about that, will the Home Secretary tell me why this year, for the first time, the police grant includes an element that specifically addresses youth unemployment?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken: research has not uncovered any link between unemployment levels and crime. However, this is one of the most arid arguments that it is possible to have. We recognise that unemployment is a social evil, whether or not it causes crime, and we pursue policies that bring unemployment down. The Labour party pursues policies—such as the introduction of the social chapter and the minimum wage—that increase unemployment. That can be seen from the figure for youth unemployment in France, of 27.7 per cent., and that for Spain, of 38.2 per cent., which is double the figure in this country.

Mrs. Peacock: Is it not outrageous that many people suggest that all those who are unemployed, and all those on low incomes, become criminals? That is an insult to the many law-abiding citizens who are unemployed, often through no fault of their own. Unemployed people should not all be put in the same category.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The vast majority of unemployed people are law-abiding citizens, and it casts a slur on them to suggest that unemployment is in any sense an excuse for crime.

Mr. Straw: While nothing could or should excuse the commission of crime, does the Home Secretary agree that high unemployment levels, especially among young people, contribute considerably to increasing the number of people who are tempted into a criminal life? Was not Lord Whitelaw—another Conservative Home Secretary—entirely correct when he said exactly that?

Mr. Howard: The question originally put by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) was about research. Research has not uncovered any link between unemployment and crime—particularly violent crime, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I repeat: if the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is so keen to reduce unemployment, why does he not persuade his party to abandon its policies on the social chapter and the minimum wage—and, indeed, the policies that would consign 16 to 18-year-olds straight from school to the dole queue? Unlike the Government, the hon. Gentleman's party would not make training compulsory for 16 to 18-year-olds, and would encourage them to become unemployed.

Mr. Brazier: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, during the 1930s, when more than 20 per cent. of the work force was unemployed, crime was at almost its lowest ever point? In the context of his last answer, will he join me in congratulating Kent training and enterprise council on its current remarkable programme under which several hundred youngsters from the worst and most difficult conditions, many of them with criminal records, are given work experience courses to prepare them for training? It includes, where necessary, physically getting them out of bed in the morning.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right to draw attention to the levels of unemployment and crime in the 1930s. I am happy to join him in endorsing the excellent work that is being carried out by Kent training and enterprise council.

Mr. Alton: Where there are sink estates and deprived social conditions, does the Secretary of State agree—to return to the point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight)—that the constant flow of violence via television and video contributes to the culture of violence?

As the House is soon to consider a broadcasting Bill, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give parents the chance to have a V-chip inserted in their television sets

so that they can sift out the violence that is being poured into their homes? What does he propose to do about James Ferman's decision—and that of the British Board of Film Classification—to license for home viewing, and therefore for access by children, a film as outrageous as the one to which the hon. Member for Edgbaston referred—"Natural Born Killers"—which glorifies violence, the killing, maiming or brutalising of 50 people and the amoral consequence of no one being held to account at the end of the film? People drive off into the sunset as if the matter were entirely neutral.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have a great deal of sympathy for the general view with which he began his question. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage is considering making the chip to which the hon. Gentleman referred available in this country. The hon. Gentleman asked about the British Board of Film Classification. He and I co-operated on strengthening the legislation that deals with such matters. It makes greater the ease and availability of judicial review for the board's decisions, and anyone who feels aggrieved by the decision to which the hon. Gentleman referred can take that avenue.

Police Patrolling

10. **Sir Michael Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recommendations of the Audit Commission in relation to police patrolling. [18991]

Mr. Maclean: I recognise the value to the public of effective patrols by the police. I therefore welcome the report and we and the police service will look carefully at its recommendations.

Sir Michael Shersby: Does my right hon. Friend agree with the Audit Commission's conclusion that traditional beat-style policing needs to be nurtured? Does he also agree that that type of policing is highly effective in dealing with street crime and vandalism, and that that view is widely shared by the public, not least my constituents in Uxbridge?

Mr. Maclean: That view is shared by the constituents of every hon. Member. Not only do the Government agree that beat patrolling has a valid role to play and should be nurtured, but we have taken positive steps to enhance it further. It is not just the extra 15,000 officers whom we have recruited since 1979 that is proof of our nurturing of the police service, or the extra 17,000 civilians who have released more bobbies for the beat, but the commitment to 5,000 more officers specifically to enhance the visible presence on the streets which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has promised and for which we have started to give out funding.

Mr. Michael: Does the Minister accept that the importance of patrolling is that it reinforces the traditional and mutual confidence between the police and the public? Does he accept that, to allow the police to concentrate on their job and to reassure the public, it is important to create a real partnership between the police, the local authority and the local community to fight crime, as advocated by the Labour party? Will he commend the local authorities that have joined local police to adopt such an approach and stop obstructing the legislative framework that they need and which was recommended by the Government's own Morgan report?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman should get into the latter part of the 20th century. The Morgan report is so old hat these days that local authorities and police partnerships are being created all over Britain without compulsion or regulation. The hon. Gentleman must decide. He is inconsistent. He asks me to acknowledge the tremendous success of partnerships and goes on to say that we must have statutory regulation to create partnerships. It is illogical nonsense. We do not need legislation because, throughout the country, partnerships are being created by voluntary means. People come together to help the police. They know that that is in their best interests. That is our policy, and it is working.

Burglars (Custodial Sentences)

11. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of burglars are given a custodial sentence; and what is the average length of time spent in prison by such offenders. [18992]

Mr. Howard: On the basis of a recent sample, a custodial sentence is imposed on 67 per cent. of people convicted of domestic burglary in the Crown court and on 22 per cent. of people convicted in magistrates courts. Average sentence lengths were 16.8 months in the Crown court and 3.9 months in the magistrates courts. Roughly half the sentence passed is spent in prison.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that those figures illustrate the need for courts not only to give longer sentences, but to give exceptionally long sentences to repeat offenders? May I urge him to press on with his proposals to introduce minimum sentences for repeat offenders and to reject the views of the judiciary?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend that the public need greater protection from persistent burglars' activities. By and large, the sentences passed by the courts on persistent burglars are inadequate. That is why there is a strong case for the introduction of minimum mandatory sentences for such burglars.

Mr. Simpson: What is the success rate of such sentences, compared with non-custodial sentences, in deterring future criminal behaviour? When does the Home Secretary plan to come before the House with a serious programme of commitments to reparation schemes in the community? Why does he insist on withdrawing funding from preventive schemes that have a record of working?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman may be surprised to hear that the recidivism rate for people leaving prison is lower than that for people who have community sentences passed on them or who have probation orders made in respect of them. When one takes into account the fact that people sentenced to prison tend to be the most serious

offenders, sentenced for the most serious offences, that is a surprising fact and not, I suspect, the answer that he thought he would receive.

Mr. Butterfill: Is not burglary a crime in respect of which there is a much higher repeat offending level? In those circumstances, is not it clear that the present sentencing level is an inadequate deterrent?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend that the public are especially at risk from persistent, prolific burglars. It is in relation to those persistent offenders that the case for minimum mandatory sentences is strongest.

Carl Bridgewater

12. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column 1126, when it was first disclosed that two unidentified fingerprints were found on the bicycle belonging to Carl Bridgewater; and if he will make a statement. [18993]

Mr. Kirkhope: The solicitors knew in November 1988, if not before, that there were two unidentified fingerprints. Papers disclosed by the Crown Prosecution Service on 22 December 1994 included the information that those prints were on the bicycle.

Mr. Mullin: I still do not think that the Minister is facing up to the facts. It was 16 years, not nine—although nine is long enough—before unidentified fingerprints were disclosed in the Carl Bridgewater case. Who knows? As the Minister is probably aware, today is the fifth anniversary of the release of the Birmingham Six. Many people regard the Carl Bridgewater case as a litmus test of whether we have learnt any lessons from the mistakes of the past. The progress so far has not been promising.

Mr. Kirkhope: I am sorry, but I dispute that. The hon. Gentleman must know that, following the provisional conclusions of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that this matter should not be referred back, the solicitors for the applicants were asked to make further representations. They have done so in part and we await hearing from them as to any other representations that they wish to make before a final decision is taken.

Probation Service

13. **Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of his removal of all training requirements on the provision of an effective probation service. [18994]

Mr. Sackville: The opportunity has now been provided to establish, with the profession, a flexible training scheme designed to meet the needs of a modern probation service.

Mr. Berry: Does the Minister recognise that the lack of appropriate training puts both probation officers and the public at risk? Which professional associations support his view on this matter?

Mr. Sackville: I am very glad to tell the hon. Gentleman that my noble Friend Baroness Blatch has written to representatives of the management, of the profession and of higher education and expects to meet them shortly to establish exactly the sort of flexible training scheme that the probation service needs. The work of the probation service is much too important for these sort of party points.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my hon. Friend agree that the new arrangements will facilitate the right people coming into the probation service, such as those coming out of the armed forces or the police, who will do a far better job than people who are merely social workers?

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend is right to suggest that the disciplines required are criminology, psychology and a whole host of others, including some training in sociology. To tell highly qualified people who apply to join the service, "You are fine, but now you have to go and do two years' social work training," is not the way to get the right people into the profession.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 March. [19012]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Booth: Will my right hon. Friend join me and others in the House in expressing our outrage and horror at the appalling deaths and killings in Dunblane yesterday?

The Prime Minister: Yesterday was an event of almost unimaginable horror. We can only begin to guess at the impact it will have upon the families and the whole community. I know that the whole House will wish to join me in extending our sympathy to the families of the children and their teacher who were killed and to the children and the other teachers who were injured in yesterday's attack. Many questions will have to be addressed and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will make a fuller statement at the end of Question Time.

Mr. Blair: May I agree with what the Prime Minister has said and simply add this: Britain today is a nation in mourning. Our senses are in a state of shock, bewildered at the sheer horror of what happened. Not war, nor a catastrophe of nature, nor human error was this, but a massacre of innocents without cause and without reason. How many parents last night will have clutched their own children to them, looking at them differently and imagining the pain which, for others, is all too real?

Politics is silent today. We grieve. We hope that this dark shadow can in time be lifted. We stand in solidarity with the community of Dunblane and we pay our respects.

The Prime Minister: Sometimes, after a tragedy, there is little we can say that we feel will bring comfort to the people concerned. After yesterday's tragedy, I believe that that is a feeling that everyone in this House will understand. Words seem inadequate; I feel that today.

The right hon. Gentleman's words will find a echo in the heart of every parent in the House and right across the country. What happened yesterday cannot be understood and must not be forgotten. It was an act of wickedness beyond imagination and I do not believe that anyone can be unmoved by that, either now or at any time in the future. What we must now do is look to the interests of the children, their families and the others who were injured and see what external help can be given—perhaps by this House, but by others as well—to try to play some part in putting that community together again.

Q2. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 March. [19013]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evennett: In the wake of the appalling tragedy in Dunblane yesterday, will my right hon. Friend urge the media to exercise the maximum possible restraint to allow that community to grieve in private?

The Prime Minister: I certainly join my hon. Friend in that request. There is a code of practice on privacy for such occasions. I hope very much that that code of practice will be rigorously observed on this occasion.

Q3. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 March. [19014]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Wigley: As someone who, before entering the House, lived in the borough of Merthyr Tydfil not far from Aberfan, may I convey the sympathy of Wales to the people of Dunblane and to all the families who have suffered loss? Does the Prime Minister accept that playing with guns can at times mean playing with lives? It should always be a certainty that neither personal indulgences nor vested interests come before assuring the safety of communities and the avoiding of tragedies such as the tragedy that happened yesterday.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's early words will be well received everywhere. On the subject of gun control, clearly my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will wish to consider the implications of the incident for any future changes in firearms control. There is of course a Firearms Consultative Committee that, as a statutory body, constantly keeps legislation under review. Its purpose is to review the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. I know that it issued a statement this morning saying that it does not propose to express a view on the matter in advance of the conclusions of the fatal accident inquiry, but that it will want to consider the implications for future firearms legislation or practice.

Q4. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 March. [19015]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: Speaking as a former teacher and in the aftermath of the awful tragedy yesterday, may I ask my right hon. Friend to reinforce the tributes that are rightly paid to head teachers and teachers who put the welfare and safety of their children above all else?

The Prime Minister: It is not very many weeks ago that the House and the country were mourning the death of another teacher, Mr. Lawrence, who was murdered outside his school by being stabbed to death. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has told me, both last night and this morning, of the courage of teachers at the school. I particularly single out the courage and performance of the headmaster, Mr. Taylor, who had appalling circumstances to deal with yesterday, but, I am informed, dealt with them with the greatest possible courage in every respect. I am happy to join my hon. Friend, himself a former head teacher, in that tribute.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: Dunblane is a small, close-knit community and no doubt that closeness will stand it in good stead as it grieves over the appalling slaughter of innocent children and their dedicated teacher. Will the Prime Minister convey to the people of Dunblane that their grieving is shared by the whole country; every parent in the land is grieving with them? In particular, will he convey to the people of Dunblane the horror and sadness of my constituents and Londoners across our capital city who feel today that they are part of that small, close-knit community?

The Prime Minister: I shall happily convey the hon. Lady's thoughts when I have the opportunity of visiting Dunblane tomorrow. She speaks for the attitude of every parent in the country. For a small number of parents, yesterday was a day of horror that they could never have imagined. The thought has flitted across the minds of every other parent in the country that it might have been their son or their daughter on that occasion.

Q5. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 March. [19016]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Butler: In common with many colleagues in the House, I went home last night to see my own children for exactly the reasons given by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). I associate myself with everything that has been said. May I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his sense of priorities, which led him to take a day out this week to attend the conference against terrorism in Egypt? Terrorism so often—and deliberately—causes the sort of grief,

slaughter and horror that was caused by one evil mad man yesterday. May I urge my right hon. Friend to do all that he can to play a full part in the international war against that most evil of activities?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think that the summit in Sharm el-Sheikh was a very useful and worthwhile occasion. It was the first time that I can recall when so many Heads of Government from different parts of the world met specifically to deal with the problems of terrorism and how to curtail and defeat it. The summit not only condemned terrorism in very strong terms but, more practically, laid the foundations for a programme of international co-operation in anti-terrorist activities. I think that everyone will welcome that.

The first meeting to follow yesterday's summit will take place within the next fortnight, and I hope that we shall see practical and worthwhile co-operation that will make the terrorist's life much more difficult than it has been hitherto. That is the determination of the Governments who met yesterday, and I look forward to seeing it carried into practice.

Q6. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 March. [19017]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Further to the Prime Minister's answer to a previous question, I too share the grief of the mourning families in Dunblane. Does he share my concern that journalists and other pundits have spent much time, recently, blaming Israel for its attitude to the Hamas terrorists, just as they blamed the Prime Minister for holding back the peace in Northern Ireland, when they should put responsibility on the terrorists who continue the terror?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I agree, without qualification, with everything that he has said.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the rule of law should always prevail in a democracy? On this day, above all others, as we discuss the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, does he agree that the House should agree unanimously to the measures? Does he agree also that terrorism and violence by the gun or by the bomb should be rooted out wherever they occur?

The Prime Minister: I think that that would be the unanimous view in dealing very severely with terrorists. The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 has proved indispensable as part of our armoury against terrorism. It is vital that its powers are continued by the House.

Mr. Norman Hogg: The Prime Minister's decision to visit Dunblane will be deeply appreciated by everyone in Scotland. Does he accept my assurance that we shall all co-operate to give the fullest support to that community in whatever action is necessary in view of this tragic and terrible event?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those remarks. I hope that everyone will understand that I visit Dunblane as a representative of the House: it is in that spirit that I conduct my visit.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the terrible tragedy will focus the prayers of the nation on mothering Sunday this weekend? Does he agree that it would be a proper mark of respect if people observed a period of silence on Sunday to remember the children and their teacher and to pray together as a nation?

The Prime Minister: I believe that, now and up to and beyond Sunday, many people will remember the events at Dunblane. Perhaps it would be particularly appropriate if the churches were just a little more crowded on Sunday.

Sir David Steel: As one who was married in Dunblane cathedral and who therefore regards it as a place of particular happiness and serenity cruelly shattered, I support the Prime Minister's decision to visit Dunblane tomorrow on behalf of the House. I add the thanks of the House to the Secretary of State for Scotland and the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), for the way in which they represented the interests of the House yesterday to that grieving community.

Although I do not suggest that anything could have prevented the madness of yesterday, will the Prime Minister ask his relevant ministerial colleagues to look again at the report of the Firearms Consultative Committee and see whether further steps can be taken in response to its recommendations without relating it to yesterday's episode?

The Prime Minister: As to the right hon. Gentleman's second point, those matters will need to be examined, and I assure him that we shall do so with an open mind. On his first point, I echo the tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) who, together, visited Dunblane yesterday. That was appropriate, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he did on that occasion.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: While we contemplate this horror, is it not wonderful that the love of children has brought the House together? I pray that it will do so more often.

The Prime Minister: Sometimes our political disputes, whether they involve great or small matters, seem very petty beside human matters. I think that this is one such occasion.

Madam Speaker: I think that we will take the statement now.

Dunblane Primary School (Shooting)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): It is with profound sadness that I have to report on the tragic event that took place at Dunblane, which is in my constituency, yesterday. Hon. Members will understand the deep shock and distress afflicting the people of Dunblane, and our first thoughts must be with the families of those who were killed and injured. Our deepest sympathies go out to them at this terrible time.

The House will appreciate that police inquiries into the matter are continuing; therefore, I shall confine my remarks to the facts surrounding the incident, so far as they have been established.

At approximately 9.15 am yesterday, an armed man, identified by the police as Thomas Hamilton, entered Dunblane primary school and opened fire on children and staff who were in the school gymnasium. Fifteen of the children who were shot and their teacher died within the school. One child died later in hospital. Three adults and 12 other children were wounded. The gunman shot himself and died within the school.

As soon as I was informed of this dreadful event, accompanied by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), I went to Dunblane, where we were joined by my hon. Friend the Scottish Education Minister, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson). What we witnessed there encompassed both the worst and the best of which humanity is capable. In contrast to the stark evil of the crime, doctors, teachers, police, ambulance personnel and other caring professions, Church leaders and volunteers worked unsparingly to save life and console the bereaved.

In particular, I want to pay the highest possible tribute to Mr. Ron Taylor, headmaster of Dunblane primary school, for his heroic efforts to save the lives of his dying pupils in circumstances too harrowing to be recounted in detail. Hon. Members will wish to join me also in a tribute to Mrs. Gwen Mayor, the dedicated teacher who was gunned down in the midst of her charges. Mrs. Mayor was an exceptionally gifted teacher, who had given 10 years' service to the school, and our heartfelt sympathy goes out to her husband Rodney and their two daughters.

I would also like to extend the sympathy of the House to Aileen Harikl, the PE teacher, and to the teaching assistants, Mary Blake and Gwen Tweddle, who were all injured. Our teachers carry the immeasurable responsibility of moulding the character of the next generation. In this tragic case, a teacher lost her life in the course of fulfilling that responsibility.

I would also like to pay tribute to the chief constable of central Scotland, William Wilson, and his officers, to the procurator fiscal at Stirling, and to the medical teams supervised by Dr. Jack Beattie, as well as the staff in the hospitals at Stirling, Falkirk and Yorkhill, who carried out their duties superbly in the most distressing circumstances. All the public services involved deserve the praise of the House, and our recognition of the trauma that will continue to live with them.

The Lord Advocate and I believe that this terrible tragedy should be thoroughly and fully investigated. We believe that it is desirable and necessary that an inquiry should be undertaken by a Senator of the College of Justice—a senior Scottish judge. Lord Cullen, who conducted the public inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster, has agreed to undertake that responsibility. The Lord Advocate plans to meet him and the Lord President of the Court of Session tomorrow to discuss the procedures that the inquiry should follow.

Her Majesty the Queen yesterday sent her condolences to all those affected by this unspeakable deed. The Queen and the Princess Royal have both expressed a wish to visit Dunblane as soon as circumstances make that appropriate, and I can tell the House that they will be going there on Monday.

Hon. Members will share my sense of the inadequacy of any attempt we make in this House to offer consolation to the families devastated by this vile crime. The cold-blooded slaughter of tiny children is beyond atrocity. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say to the stricken families of Dunblane: "Our deepest sympathy and our prayers are with you and for you. You have the support of countless people around the world in your grief."

Tomorrow night, the people of Dunblane will be holding a vigil for their dead, their injured and their bereaved. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that the prayers and thoughts of all hon. Members will be with them. The whole nation mourns.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his statement, and for his consideration and kindness in inviting me to join him in Dunblane yesterday. I agree with every word that the right hon. Gentleman said. I warmly welcome the fact that Her Majesty the Queen will visit the town next Monday.

There will not be a single person in this country who would not have wakened this morning hoping beyond hope that yesterday was just a bad dream; so there will be nobody today who will not experience huge sadness and dismay on realising that it did all happen.

One does not need to have lived in the town of Dunblane or to have seen three children go through Dunblane primary school to share the grief, horror and sheer desolation that our town feels today—one just has to be a fellow human being. It was that worst of all possible nightmares that any parent can think of—and for it to happen to so many of the littlest and most innocent makes the tragedy one of unspeakable misery.

I have to say that Dunblane today is worse than yesterday in its mourning, and tomorrow will probably be worse still, as the enormity of the massacre comes home in the shape of real children gone, real families afflicted, and a whole community scarred and tortured.

I join the Secretary of State's tributes to headmaster Ron Taylor, whose composure and self-control—which we witnessed yesterday—in the face of the most traumatic events was an inspiration. To act with speed and calmness as tiny pupils die in one's arms cannot be described as ordinary professionalism—it was heroism. The staff of the school also deserve great praise and thanks. We deeply mourn Gwen Mayor, the truly dedicated teacher who died with her charges in the gymnasium.

The Secretary and I met, spoke to and thanked—and I do so again—members of the emergency services, police, ambulance staff and medical teams from a supremely dedicated health service, who acted with superlative dedication and skill, even when their own emotions were

tested to the limit. We must be so grateful for the caring services of the local councils, Church leaders and members of the whole community, who poured in to help.

Naturally, there are questions to be asked—with the nation, let alone the local community, needing answers. The worst service that we can do to the infant victims is to rush to instant judgment. Therefore, I strongly welcome the decision to appoint a High Court judge of the calibre of Lord Cullen to investigate all the circumstances of yesterday.

Those of us who met and distrusted Thomas Hamilton—I argued with him in my own home—in truth could have had no inkling to guide us to his final act of wantonness. Of course, we expect a thorough examination of and any necessary action on the present gun laws, which enabled such a man to own such a lethal armoury. School security, too, will need looking at, but we should not pretend to ourselves that even a fortress would have kept an armed, crazed, suicidal killer at bay. That is not for today.

Today, the nation stands beside and with a community devastated by a unique and terrible act of evil. We here, and all of us who would root out the sickness that spawns such an awful act, stand together in mourning and sympathy with those whose loss today is beyond repair.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the inquiry to be headed by Lord Cullen. I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's comments about Thomas Hamilton. I, too, had some contact with him, as his constituency Member of Parliament, and I agree that there could have been no inkling that he would be capable of such a terrible act.

I entirely endorse the hon. Gentleman's point about not rushing to judgment, and of course he is right to highlight questions such as gun law and the security of schools, which will need to be considered in the context of the findings of the inquiry. I will ensure that the Lord Advocate does everything possible to ensure that the inquiry is conducted speedily, so that those matters can be quickly laid to rest.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): The whole House shares the grief of the people of Dunblane at this horrible massacre. Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Dumfries and Galloway regional council has considerable expertise in counselling and support, following the Lockerbie air disaster, and is very anxious to help in any way if it can?

Will my right hon. Friend accept that I am glad that he has set up an inquiry by Lord Cullen? I hope that it reports as soon as possible, so that action can be taken subsequently.

Mr. Forsyth: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for the offer of assistance. May I use this opportunity to thank all the local authorities which offered help and support, including Strathclyde, which provided tremendous support through the police, and the many authorities which have offered expert support with counselling, which has been taken up by the community? I will certainly try to ensure that my right hon. Friend's request is met.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): The Secretary of State will be aware of my long association with the district in which the community of Dunblane lies. When I spoke to my friends in Dunblane about attempting to make a statement here, they said, "How can one put into words the silent scream that went through the community of Dunblane yesterday?" Like the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), I have often shared in the joys of that dynamic community in the past. I am certain that I speak for everyone in the House when I say that we attempt to reach out to the people of Dunblane to offer to share some of the burden that has now been laid upon them.

In particular, I ask the House to send our condolences to families who have lost children and grandchildren, to the family and colleagues of the teacher who was murdered yesterday, and to the community which, as one of my friends from Dunblane said, has had the heart and soul torn from it in this terrible and violent tragedy.

I have been in constant contact with my friends and former colleagues in Dunblane yesterday and today, and they are already deeply touched by the messages sent by many people from all round the country, including those in Aberfan who have faxed messages to them.

Will the Secretary of State pass on to the Prime Minister the community's thanks that he will visit the town tomorrow, in a non-political, all-party manner, to carry the wishes of the House to them for a speedy recovery from this terrible tragedy?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman and I are sparring partners of old, but today we are united in our grief. I am sure that the people of Dunblane will appreciate his words today. In the Scottish Office, we have received telegrams and messages from all over the world. This is a tragedy that has struck a chord with parents everywhere, and the hon. Gentleman's remarks will be much appreciated by the people of Dunblane.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will my right hon. Friend accept the great concern and good wishes of my constituents, from whom, over the past 24 hours, I have taken a number of calls? One of them, Mrs. Ray of Ayr, has asked me to suggest to the House that we stand for one minute's silence. Whether that is possible under the rules of the House, I am not sure; if not, perhaps what the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) suggested might be considered at a later date.

Mr. Forsyth: I am sure that all of us will find our own ways of recognising this tragedy—some in prayer, some by keeping silences, some by contemplating what has happened. I believe that the message from this House could not be clearer to the people of this country: we all share the grief that the parents who have lost children in Dunblane feel, and in their grieving we stand as one with them.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The moving expressions of tribute by the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) could not be bettered. They have spoken for the whole House, and I will not elaborate on them. I merely hope that what cannot be said will itself speak volumes. Many of us cannot put into words what we actually feel.

I welcome the appointment of such a distinguished judge as Lord Cullen. Can the Secretary of State confirm that his inquiry will have a wider remit than a fatal accident inquiry

[Mr. James Wallace]

would? Obviously, we want the investigation to be as thorough as possible. Will it be possible to commence the inquiry in the not too distant future?

The Secretary of State has said that anything we say will be inadequate, but will he relay to his constituents on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends and of the people of the United Kingdom the thought that, although our words may be inadequate, we shall give the people of Dunblane what we can in terms of our love, support and prayers?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last sentiment. The hon. Gentleman is a lawyer, and as such he has the advantage of me, but he will know that, under Scots law, there has to be a fatal accident inquiry, usually led by the sheriff in the area concerned. The Lord Advocate and I felt that the circumstances surrounding this tragedy were so serious that it was right to have a senior and distinguished judge of Lord Cullen's rank to carry out the inquiry. We were extremely grateful to him for agreeing to do it so promptly.

If the House will permit me to, I should like to make a further statement on how the inquiry will be carried out once the Lord Advocate has had an opportunity to discuss with Lord Cullen his views on the matter, which are an important aspect of any consideration.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Great grief is never great at talking; it is not words, but tears and a sob and a heartbreak. This House has today reflected that more than I have ever seen in the many years I have sat in it. When I heard about the tragedy, I thought of the text of scripture that says:

"Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted . . . because they were not."

Today I think of those who weep for their children and cannot be comforted because they are not. That text comes from Old Testament prophecy and it holds out a great hope.

Over against the wickedness of this crime I hear the words of the Saviour, who said:

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the Kingdom of God."

I trust that that faith and that hope will cast a beautiful rainbow over this terrible valley of tears.

I would associate the people of Northern Ireland in sympathy with the people of Dunblane. We have walked our valleys; we too have known the anguish; we too have felt the pain. Deep today calls unto deep from Northern Ireland to those who sorrow in Scotland.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. If there is one hope for the future, it lies in the nature of the community of Dunblane. It is a strong, God-fearing community, well served by voluntary organisations. I am sure that they will rally round to meet this tragedy; but nothing we can say or do, or they can do in Dunblane, can remove what was done yesterday. I hope that there will never be another day when this House has to contemplate such an act.

Sir James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): As one who had the privilege of visiting Dunblane only a few months ago, may I associate my hon. Friends with what has been said already? As the Prime Minister rightly said, at such a time words can be extremely inadequate. But we would all want the grieving families and all who have suffered to know that they will be very much in our thoughts and prayers in the coming days and weeks.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Hamilton and I found that we could not find adequate words. We could only show solidarity with the community by being there and showing the people that we felt for them, as the hon. Gentleman and the House have done this afternoon.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): My right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) have told the House that it and the country have united in horror and grief at what happened. On a practical point, is my right hon. Friend able to assure the House that he will tell us as soon as possible what the approximate timetable will be for the welcome inquiry by Lord Cullen?

Mr. Forsyth: Yes, I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. I am sure that he will understand that it is necessary for us to consult Lord Cullen before being in a position to do what my hon. Friend asks.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): May I convey the deep sorrow of the Scottish all-party children's group for the families and people of Dunblane? It is not that long since all the parties in this place co-operated in legislating for children in Scotland. The group very much welcomes the Secretary of State's promptness in instigating an inquiry, and Lord Cullen's acceptance of the task. I can only say now that I am sure that we shall all co-operate in any necessary future legislation or action that seems to be helpful following any of Lord Cullen's recommendations.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. I am aware of the interest that she takes in matters involving children's policy. I must say that it is hard to think of legislation that we could pass that would in its implementation act against the sort of irrational act of madness which we saw carried out yesterday.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I have three young daughters of primary school age, and my heart goes out to those who have been devastated by what happened yesterday. The Secretary of State will probably not be aware that that man Thomas Hamilton was running a youth club for primary children in Bishopbriggs in my constituency. I would be grateful if the Secretary of State were to ensure that Lord Cullen's inquiry will examine Hamilton's activities in my constituency.

Mr. Forsyth: I am sure that all Members, including me, will want to make available to the inquiry any information they have. I am sure that the proper place or stage at which these matters should be examined is during Lord Cullen's inquiry. I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing the matter to my attention.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Although my constituency is a long way away from Dunblane, the loss of my 12-year-old daughter 15 years ago makes me feel extremely close. May I ask my right hon. Friend to convey yet another message to his bereaved constituents? It is simply this: "Although you will feel utterly alone, you are

not. All of us who have been through a similar hell are willing you on and praying for you. There is hope—really, there is. Although, as the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said, it will go on getting worse every day and you, the people of Dunblane, will never get over it, please believe me that it really is just possible to rebuild a life of some sort."

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those words of comfort, which are based on his own tragic experience. The Leader of the Opposition said that every family with children must have had such thoughts last night; such thoughts went through my mind. I am sure that my hon. Friend's experience will provide some comfort. It is difficult for people with children to imagine what it must be like to have to cope with the loss of a child.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): May I ask the Secretary of State to convey our heartfelt condolences to the people of Dunblane; their sorrow is shared by all of us. Will he, please, thank the emergency services, teachers, police and the health and other organisations for the outstanding work they have done? I welcome the inquiry, and I ask that it also examines the general issues of gun legislation and school security. I hope that the inquiry will be able to get to the truth of the matter. I thank the Secretary of State personally for the way in which he has conveyed the feelings of the House to the people in his constituency.

Mr. Forsyth: Clearly, it will be a matter for Lord Cullen to decide which issues he will want to examine in the context of this incident, but I am sure that the points made by the hon. Gentleman about the rules governing gun control and the issue of school security will feature among them. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has pointed out, those matters are kept under constant review, and the Firearms Consultative Committee, which has been established for that purpose, has said today that it will want to take full account of any issues arising from the inquiry, and any recommendations following from it.

I do not wish in any way to pre-empt any of the inquiry's conclusions, but, having been to the school yesterday, I think that it is very hard to see how it would have been possible to have security around the school that would have prevented a man armed with four guns from being able to carry out that terrible deed, which we now know he did.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Will the Secretary of State convey to the people of Dunblane the sincere condolences of the people in Dundee? Some years ago, an armed gunman broke into St. John's high school in my constituency, and Mrs. Nanette Hanson, a teacher there, lost her life protecting her pupils. So—in a small way compared with the horrifying scale of what happened yesterday in Dunblane—the people of Dundee have experienced the actions of a deranged gunman. In that experience, we are with the people of Dunblane in their hour of sorrow.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The loss of a teacher's life yesterday in protecting the children in her charge, as in the case of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, perhaps underlines very graphically the debt we owe to the teaching profession, which serves us so well throughout the United Kingdom.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): May I tell the Secretary of State that some of my constituents have told me that this is a moment for commiseration and deep condolences for the families in Dunblane; hence, my constituents appreciate the decision to postpone tomorrow's meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee. May I tell him how much I welcome his promise of a statement to the House on the terms of reference of Lord Cullen's inquiry? Will he give serious thought to the idea of giving a statement to the next meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee on the licensing of firearms, and the criteria by which they are issued?

Mr. Forsyth: I said that I would inform the House. I am not sure whether it is necessary to make a statement to the House about the terms, but I shall certainly be happy to discuss that matter with the hon. Gentleman.

As for making a statement to the next Scottish Grand Committee on the issue of firearms, it might be more appropriate to allow the inquiry to get under way—I hope that it will be conducted speedily. Once we have the inquiry's conclusions, we will be in a position to decide what, if any, action should be taken. I think that the hon. Member for Hamilton's words—that we should not rush too quickly to judgment at this time, of all times—are very wise, and I am sure that all hon. Members will think them worthy of being heeded.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): May I thank the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) for speaking so sympathetically and eloquently for all of us in the House and in Scotland? I add my voice to those of my colleagues and others who would welcome Lord Cullen examining the question of firearms and their use. If he is not to do so, we would welcome some other examination of the issue.

There have been a number of other incidents and, although they were not as serious and tragic as this one, firearms are a cause for concern. I hope that the Secretary of State will include their use in the terms of reference of Lord Cullen's inquiry, or give rapid further consideration to how the law can be changed. I know that this incident might not have been prevented, but it might make similar situations less likely in future.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The Firearms Consultative Committee keeps the legislation under review. I shall certainly ensure that the hon. Gentleman's comments are drawn to its attention. As I said, it has said that it will wish to examine such matters in the light of the inquiry's findings, but I shall certainly make sure that the committee is aware of what the hon. Gentleman has just said.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): As the Member of Parliament representing a neighbouring constituency, may I join in the expression of sympathy for the parents, relatives and friends of the victims of this horrific massacre? As a former teacher in Central region, may I also pay tribute to the heroism of the class teacher, Mrs. Gwen Mayor, and the head teacher, Mr. Ron Taylor?

[Mr. Dennis Canavan]

Without prejudging the findings of Lord Cullen's inquiry, could the Secretary of State please tell the House at this stage whether the perpetrator of this evil crime did in fact have a firearms certificate? If so, will he ensure that Lord Cullen's inquiry will be a full investigation of how on earth an infamous character such as Thomas Hamilton could apparently obtain a firearms certificate that apparently enabled him to carry four lethal handguns and how, according to some reports, he was apparently running a gun club at some stage?

Mr. Forsyth: I confirm that it is my understanding that Mr. Hamilton had a firearms licence for the weapons concerned. It is also my understanding that he had no criminal convictions, and that he had had licences for many years. The hon. Gentleman began his question by asking me not to prejudge the findings of Lord Cullen's inquiry; he will therefore forgive me if I do not draw conclusions, which I felt that he was beginning to do.

Lord Cullen was responsible for the inquiry following the Piper Alpha disaster, and I think it is common ground that he did a thorough and excellent job in inquiring into the circumstances of that disaster and making recommendations. I am sure that the same skills and abilities will be deployed in considering all the issues that concern the hon. Gentleman. I think that we would do well to wait until he has produced his findings before reaching any conclusions.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I think that we should come to a close. But I believe that we have not heard from anyone representing Wales.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): The reason I waited until the end was that I thought Scottish Members and others should have preference. Some of the constituencies of Wales were directly involved with the disaster at Aberfan, so perhaps we can share even more closely the feelings that have been expressed this afternoon.

Given our experience with parents who suffered the loss of their children, and in view of the remarks expressed this afternoon about the reaction of parents, might I ask the Government to ensure that there is adequate finance for counselling, because many people in the area will need a great deal? I plead with the Government to ensure that ready money is available immediately, so that counselling can start straight away.

The experience that the Government could gain from people who were or who still are involved in counselling in Aberfan could give the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State a great deal of assistance in helping the grieving parents.

Mr. Forsyth: Not just the parents, but the children in the school as well, who will have been traumatised by this experience.

Of course resources will be made available. Yesterday, when the hon. Member for Hamilton and I were in Dunblane, we had an opportunity to discuss these matters with the local authorities and others. They have been overwhelmed by offers of support and help, and of course we shall ensure that the resources are available for that.

All the evidence is that the counselling has already begun, and people are doing everything they can to lend help and support. But, if I may say so, I think that it is a mistake to believe that counselling can wipe things away or undo the harm that has been done. It is an important prop. It is an aid. When we visited the school yesterday, people were already very much involved in that.

I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his offer of Celtic support from Wales. We Scots and the Welsh have much in common and the hon. Gentleman's words will be very much appreciated in Scotland.

Madam Speaker: I wish to call one more hon. Member. Mr. Martyn Jones.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): As a lay member of the Firearms Consultative Committee, which by pure chance met this morning, I wish to convey its great concern over this incredibly evil act. We have heard so many hon. Members in the Chamber expressing views that, in truth, are inexpressible.

I am pleased, as I know is the Firearms Consultative Committee, that a full inquiry is being instituted. If there is any chance that something has gone wrong in administration, or if the committee could suggest further legislation, will Government time be given for that at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I cannot commit legislation without having a specific proposal, and without the support and agreement of my right hon. Friends. But what I can say is that the committee is there in order to keep the firearms legislation under review, and I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I would consider carefully any proposals that are put forward in the light of consideration of the circumstances and any recommendations which might come from the inquiry.

Business of the House

4.8 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I would like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 18 MARCH—Opposition Day (7th allotted day). Until 7 o'clock, there will be a debate entitled "The Government's Threatened Withdrawal of Employment Rights", followed by a debate on the proposed privatisation of HMSO. Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Motion relating to the Education (School Premises) Regulations.

TUESDAY 19 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill.

WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the Reserve Forces Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Oil and Chemical Pollution of Fish and Plants) Order.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock.

THURSDAY 21 MARCH—Debate on the forthcoming intergovernmental conference on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 22 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 20 March to consider European Community document No. COM(95)541 relating to co-operation with Gulf states.

The House might also find it helpful to know that, on a provisional basis, I anticipate that the business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 25 MARCH—Second Reading of the Family Law Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 26 MARCH—Opposition Day (8th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Progress on remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 28 MARCH—Until about 7 o'clock, conclusion of remaining stages of the Finance Bill.

FRIDAY 29 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

[Wednesday 20 March:

European Standing Committee B—European Community document: COM(95)541, Co-operation with Gulf States. Relevant European Legislation Report: HC 51-vi (1995-96).]

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for that information and for arranging yesterday's brief statement. I also thank him for today's statement on the Dunblane incident. I am sure that he will ensure that the House is kept informed of any developments following the inquiry into that incident. I assure him that if the inquiry concludes that changes in legislation are required, Opposition Members will do all that we can to facilitate the passage of any legislation that is judged necessary.

I come now to next week's business. Is the Leader of the House willing to reconsider, even at this late stage, the decision for next Thursday's debate to take place on a motion for the Adjournment? It appears that the Government persist in hiding behind a procedural device rather than presenting the House with a substantive motion, which could be amended and which could ensure that the Government were left in no doubt whatever about the feelings of the House on the vital issues that surround discussions on the intergovernmental conference.

On a different issue, will the Leader of the House find Government time for a debate on cold weather payments, and in particular the refusal of the Department of Social Security to provide basic information about the number of claimants who have received one, two, three or four payments this winter? If such simple information cannot be provided, how can our constituents have any confidence whatever in the system? If that confidence is not there, surely the House should debate the matter.

Will the Leader of the House find time to debate today's report of the parliamentary ombudsman on the efficiency—or lack of it—of the Child Support Agency, and specifically his proposal for an independent complaints adjudicator; a proposal which was first made in May this year and which he repeated today? He has made it clear that the CSA's performance is still far from adequate, and many hon. Members must have had the same experience as me, of not being able to obtain proper replies from the CSA unless parliamentary questions are tabled. As the ombudsman has stated that the CSA accounts for one third of all the complaints that he receives about all Government Departments, surely the Leader of the House must acknowledge that the time is drawing near when another debate would be appropriate.

Finally, I remind the Leader of the House of our request for a statement when the Dearing report on the education of 16 to 19-year-olds is published. It would be appropriate to have a statement in the House as well as outside.

Mr. Newton: I thank the hon. Lady for what she said about Dunblane, and any action that might be required in the light of the inquiry announced just now by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. I was grateful to her, and others, for the co-operation between the usual channels that enabled us to make our own short statements yesterday, and to agree on an appropriate way of handling this awful matter.

I note the hon. Lady's request in regard to the debate on the intergovernmental conference, but precedents have been set for some little time. Wide-ranging debates in advance of European Council meetings have taken place on motions for the Adjournment, and I consider that course appropriate in relation to Turin—particularly as the debate is intended to deal with the IGC as a whole, to which the White Paper is relevant, rather than being limited to the subject of the White Paper as such.

I cannot promise a debate on cold weather payments, but I shall certainly bring the hon. Lady's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

The parliamentary ombudsman's report on the Child Support Agency deals with 195 cases; the agency is currently dealing with over 1 million. That is not to

[Mr. Newton]

minimise the problems that arise when any individual case goes wrong, but merely to put the position into perspective. As the hon. Lady knows, the difficulties in the workings of the CSA have frequently been acknowledged, and a good deal of action has been taken—with considerable success—to improve the situation. As for the hon. Lady's specific question, the CSA is examining the practicalities of introducing an independent complaints examiner, and Ministers are considering a number of options.

I think that I can safely tell the hon. Lady that I, too, think that a statement to the House about the Dearing report would be appropriate. I hope that it will be possible for such a statement to be made before the end of the month.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many Conservative Members believe that his decision to hold Thursday's debate on Europe on a motion for the Adjournment was right? Is it not sensible to have a debate of that kind at this stage, while keeping open the possibility of a longer and more substantial debate, perhaps on a substantive motion, at a later stage, when the House is aware of the outcome—if any—of the intergovernmental conference?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his supportive remarks.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I welcome the fact that the Leader of the House was able to tell us, on a provisional basis, the business for the second week. That is convenient for all hon. Members.

May I express a degree of disappointment that the Government's statement about small businesses was not made in the House? Will the right hon. Gentleman use his good offices and encourage his colleagues, when they make important statements, to make them in the House?

I do not think that it was appropriate for the right hon. Gentleman, in his response to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), to compare the IGC with Council meetings. This is an intergovernmental conference, not a Council meeting. Precedents that have applied to Adjournment debates in the past do not apply in this instance.

Mr. Newton: It certainly is a Council meeting, albeit a meeting of a special European Council. The hon. Gentleman will find that over a long period there have been various precedents, but I do not want to haggle with him, especially this afternoon. The bottom line is that I consider an Adjournment debate appropriate at this juncture, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) for agreeing with that view.

I always try to take account of the sensitivities of the House in relation to statements on policy, and I note what the hon. Gentleman said about that. As for his opening remarks, let me simply say that I am grateful for them.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I agree with what has been said in favour of holding the debate on the IGC White Paper on the Adjournment. It is clear that all parties in the House are divided on the issue. Is it not better for us to hear all the disparate views on this important subject than to debate it on a party political basis, playing arithmetic to find ways of embarrassing the Prime Minister?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that I want, on this particular afternoon, to engage in arguments about the reason for holding the debate in this way. I believe, however, that the issue is wide ranging, and that it is appropriate for the House to debate it on an Adjournment motion—which can easily be arranged—rather than trying to tie it down in a restrictive way.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Does the Leader of the House share my dismay at learning that the Stockport scanner appeal continued to raise money long after it had reached its target, and in so doing, I think misled the people of Stockport, who continued to give generously? That raises some important issues about how charities raising money for national health service equipment operate. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on the matter?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure that I could undertake to find time for such a debate. The hon. Lady might care to think of it as an appropriate subject for a Wednesday morning. I know that she will understand when I say that I am not able to comment on the circumstances. I think I am right in saying that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is responsible for the charity commissioners, and he is on the Bench with me.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many Conservative Members who have had a long-standing interest in European matters, sometimes controversially, are delighted by the form of the motion that he and the Government have tabled, on the intergovernmental conference? The matters are so complex and wide that it is right for them to be presented in a way that allows wide debate.

Mr. Newton: I am beginning to find positively heart-warming the amount of support from behind me, and I grateful for that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May we have a debate on the national lottery? I am getting many letters at the moment, and a great deal of concern is being expressed in the newspapers about the possibility of a second draw each week. I notice that no fewer than seven scratchcards are now available. Some serious matters are being raised and I do not recall us being made aware in any way of Camelot's great possibilities to continue to make its own money. It seems that Peter Davis, the Director General of Oflot, is prepared to let Camelot print its own money. Indeed, at the moment he seems to be providing the printing presses. The House ought to have another look. Can the Leader of the House offer the possibility of an early debate?

Mr. Newton: All that I can do is note the hon. Gentleman's request and say that, as I understand it, Camelot has not submitted an application for a mid-week draw to the regulator. If it does, the Director General of Oflot will carefully consider its merits.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Can my right hon. Friend find time as soon as possible for a full-day debate

on energy policy, so that we are able to look not only at the benefits of the privatisation of gas and electricity, but at alternative sources of energy? I have two issues in mind, the first of which is the siting of windmills. They are unbelievably ugly and we must be extremely careful about where they are sited. The second issue is the burning of secondary fuels. Castle Cement in my constituency is currently burning a fuel called Cemfuel and there is great cause for concern in my constituency about that. I have told Ministers that I intend to seek a meeting with them. It would be useful for the House to debate the whole question of energy policy, and I know that hon. Members in all parts of the House are interested in many issues relating to it.

Mr. Newton: That is another request which I shall most certainly note, although I cannot make a promise this afternoon.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): There was a question on the Order Paper today for Home Office questions about the possibility of the Government introducing identity cards. Unfortunately, the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) did not appear to ask his question. I remind the Leader of the House of a report a year ago in *The Observer* under the heading, "Major plays ID card to trump Blair". The report said:

"John Major . . . promised the introduction of compulsory identity cards to help 'deter crime and make it more likely that we will catch criminals'."

The article continued:

"A Number 10 source said it was a question of how they were to be introduced—not whether."

Will the Leader of the House make a statement about that?

Mr. Newton: As that is a frustrated question from Home Office Question Time and as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is on the Front Bench beside me, I shall leave him to respond in due course, in whatever way he feels is appropriate.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 611, which was tabled by the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) and which I have also signed. It states:

[*That this House, while recognising the value of wind turbines in producing renewable energy, is alarmed at the spread of these structures in areas of attractive landscape, particularly the up-lands of Cumbria and Lancashire; and urges the Secretary of State for the Environment to respond to the Countryside Commission's suggestion that PPG 22 be revised and strengthened to prevent the permanent defacing of many of this country's most attractive areas.*]

The hon. Gentleman draws particular attention to Cumbria and Lancashire, but I assure my right hon. Friend that the impact of those infernal machines is felt increasingly throughout the United Kingdom's beautiful countryside, and that often those machines are energy sinks. They rarely provide net energy and are much more expensive. Every electricity consumer is paying a levy, which subsidises inefficient energy generation that helps to desecrate our remaining beautiful countryside.

Mr. Newton: I shall bring my hon. Friend's remarks, along with those of my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I was shocked at the complacency of the Leader of the House in his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) about the Child Support Agency and a possible debate on the ombudsman's report. It was rather like the complacency this morning of Miss Chant on the "Today" programme. I do not, however, believe the Leader of the House to be a complacent person. I remind him that that is not the ombudsman's first report about the CSA. As a member of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, I urge the Leader of the House to think again about the possibility of a debate. The fact that only 195 cases were mentioned in the report does not mean that nothing else was wrong with the CSA, but means that those were the worst examples that the ombudsman wished to bring to our attention.

Mr. Newton: I should greatly regret it if my remarks sounded complacent, which they were not intended to be, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for acknowledging that she does not regard me as complacent on those matters. I should like to make two other points. First, I understand that, of 20 cases in the report chosen as examples, 14 began in 1993, so they go back to a significantly earlier stage. Secondly, a recent report by the Social Security Select Committee said:

"The agency is now on a surer footing and a whole range of indicators suggest that improvements are being made."

I am not in any way complacent, but it is reasonable to expect some acknowledgement of the efforts to bring about improvements.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): The Leader of the House said that the Family Law Bill would have its Second Reading in this Chamber on Monday week. What attitude do the Government intend to take to the decision in the other place to support pension splitting? Does he not agree that that is an important move in the right direction, to ensure that women's rights are protected and promoted?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady will know that the Government always carefully consider comments and changes made in another place. That consideration is continuing and I am not in a position to reveal its outcome this afternoon.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose—*

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: It is my practice to call only Members who have heard the statement. I do not know whether the two hon. Gentlemen who want to be called did so. Were they in the Chamber when the Leader of the House made his statement? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] In that case, obviously, I cannot ask Members to question a statement that they have not heard.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94H(1) (Scottish Grand Committee (Sittings)),

That the Order of the House [11th December] be further amended by leaving out paragraph 6, and the sitting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Glasgow City Chambers to-morrow be thereby discharged.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

Question agreed to.

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

[Relevant document: the memorandum relating to this instrument contained in the Eleventh Report from the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments (House of Commons Paper No. 34-xi of Session 1995-96).]

4.28 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 22nd February, be approved.

Madam Speaker: I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motion:

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Exclusion Orders) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 22nd February, be approved.

I have put a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

Mr. Howard: The first item—the order—renews the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 for a further 12 months. The second—the regulations—makes some minor amendments to schedule 2 to the Act which will bring the procedures under which exclusion orders are made into line with European Community law following the judgment given in the Gallagher case.

On the renewal of the PTA, I should like to begin by thanking Mr. John Rowe QC, who has once again conducted the annual review of the legislation and whose report informs our discussions today. His clear conclusion, following wide consultation and an entirely independent scrutiny of the operation of the Act in 1995, is that it should be renewed—and in its entirety—for a further 12 months. Before explaining why the Government have decided to accept his recommendation, I should like to say something about the background to this debate.

Since the first Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act in 1974, successive Home Secretaries have come before the House to argue the case for renewal. Not one has undertaken that task without feeling both sorrow and anger that such measures are, and continue to be, necessary to protect and defend the citizens of this country from those who are prepared to engage in acts of terror—to kill and to maim by bomb and by bullet. The sadness I feel today must be at least the equal of that felt on any such occasion over the past 20 years.

This is the third year in which I have asked the House to renew the Act. On each occasion, the backdrop to the debate has been different. On the first occasion, in 1994, the IRA's campaign was in full flood. Indeed, as the House may recall, I was just winding up the debate when news reached me of the mortars that had fallen on Heathrow airport less than an hour before. I appealed then to the whole House to unite with the Government so as to send a signal to those responsible for that campaign that the House was united, that it was

"determined to face them down and to make available to the police the powers that they need to fight terrorism."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 335.]

To my regret, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who now leads the Opposition and was then his party's spokesman on home affairs, rejected that call. The Labour party voted against the Government and against the continuation of the powers in the Act.

Last year, I brought a renewal order to the House against the backdrop of a cessation of violence by the IRA and a subsequent ceasefire by loyalist paramilitaries. I was able to point to the hope felt by many in Great Britain and Northern Ireland that the threat from terrorism would recede. At that time, for the first time for many years, the people of Northern Ireland were able to go about their daily business without fear of violence from republican or loyalist paramilitaries. For the first time for many years, there was no imminent threat of IRA violence in the towns and cities of Great Britain.

I argued, nevertheless, for the renewal of the Act because the terrorists had retained their structure, their organisation and their arsenals intact. They had retained the capacity to strike whenever they chose. It would have been irresponsible for any Government, in such circumstances, to have dismantled their defences and allowed the powers in the Act to lapse. Again I invited the Labour party to support the Government, but Labour Members again voted against the Act's renewal. They opposed the renewal because, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) told the House, they considered the power to make exclusion orders a form of internal exile; because the Act provides for the deciding voice in any decision to extend detention under the PTA to be that of the Secretary of State, not a judge; and because there was, in their view, a need for a general and comprehensive review of anti-terrorist legislation then in force.

The Labour party has now, I understand, decided to change its position to abstention because one of those points has fallen to the ground with the Government's announcement of the inquiry by Lord Lloyd of Berwick. The other points that were raised last year are apparently less crucial than they were. I am pleased to see some change in the position of the Labour party even if, as I shall explain later, I do not believe that it goes anything like far enough.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): It would have helped if the Home Secretary had started with a different tone and recognised the total condemnation of terrorism by both sides of the House. He did not do that in his opening remarks.

The Government's position has changed, too, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows it. The number of exclusion orders and of people detained have been dropping consistently for some years. That does not mean that the principle of exclusion is all right, but it does mean that the Government are at last recognising what Lord Colville and many in the House have argued—that the use of the powers needed to be phased out. The Government have cut their use and, for that, I am grateful.

Mr. Howard: I am coming very precisely to the use of the powers and the fact that it has indeed been possible to use them on fewer occasions than in the past. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said.

Since the ceasefire, the Government have, as the House knows, spared no effort to consolidate the 1994 cessation of violence into a lasting peace.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Home Secretary acknowledge that political prisoners played a very considerable role in persuading paramilitaries in both communities to bring about the cessation of violence? How does he explain the total absence of generosity and imagination, which the Government promised if a cessation of violence came about? Why has Patrick Kelly still not been repatriated to the Republic of Ireland? Why are four life sentence prisoners serving parole in the United Kingdom rather than being returned to the Republic of Ireland? Why are republican prisoners in Belmarsh prison treated so differently from others in the Prison Service? Why has he not shown the generosity and imagination that the Government said would be shown to political prisoners who played such a tremendous part in bringing about the cessation of violence?

Mr. Howard: There are no political prisoners in this country. The prisoners to whom I believe the hon. Gentleman has referred have been convicted of crimes against the ordinary law of this country, such as murder, attempted murder, conspiracy to murder and other very serious violent crimes. They are treated in exactly the same way as others who have been convicted of similar crimes and who pose similar risks of escape.

Mr. Madden *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Howard: Since the hon. Gentleman shakes his head, it may be appropriate to remind the House that, after the ceasefire was announced, IRA prisoners who had been convicted of most serious offences attempted to escape from Whitemoor prison. One shot at and wounded a prison officer during the escape attempt. That is the reality behind the hon. Gentleman's question. He does not serve any purpose by trying to mislead the House or the country with the kind of language that he used.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I note that the Home Secretary says that all convicted prisoners are treated in the same way. Does that apply to someone who is convicted of murder? I speak of Private Lee Clegg. Will the Home Secretary give his opinion on whether Private Clegg was a political prisoner or got political parole in circumstances when others did not?

Mr. Howard: No, the procedures that were applied in that case were identical to those that are applied in every other case. The ordinary law of the land was followed. The country will take note of Opposition Members' reactions to the unchallengeable observations that I have made.

I was dealing with the question of the ceasefire and the actions that the Government have taken since then to attempt to consolidate the cessation of violence into a lasting peace.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Speaking as a member of the Cabinet that sent in the troops in 1969 and as a member of the Cabinet following the Birmingham bombing when the Act was introduced, may I ask whether the Home Secretary has reflected on the fact that, over the whole of that period, a ceasefire was never achieved by the PTA? The work of Albert Reynolds, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and Mr. Adams secured the ceasefire. The Act, with all its risks to civil liberty, has played no part whatever in dealing with the problem of violence in Northern Ireland. All-party talks are the only way in which to deal with the situation.

Mr. Howard: I attempt to be accurate in my claims. I have never claimed that the prevention of terrorism Act

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was responsible for the ceasefire. It is not the purpose of the prevention of terrorism Act to achieve a ceasefire: its purpose is to protect the lives of innocent people in this country, to protect those who have been the victims of the bomb and the bullet for many years and to try to ensure that others do not find themselves in a similar plight.

In the months that followed the declaration of the ceasefires, we were able to scale down the more visible and inconvenient aspects of security. In Northern Ireland, soldiers were taken off the streets and all border crossing points were reopened. The number of house searches carried out under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 was reduced by 75 per cent., and the number of those arrested under section 14 of the prevention of terrorism Act also fell markedly. New investment and new jobs poured into Northern Ireland. Tourism was on the increase.

The number of detentions under the PTA in the United Kingdom for 1995 was 70 per cent. down on the figure for 1994. We constantly sought to move the peace process forward. We talked to all the parties, including Sinn Fein, at ministerial and official level, but the response to our continued requests for some gesture from the terrorists of their peaceful intent went unanswered until the evening of 9 February.

The answer was the devastating explosion at South Quay. As ever, the IRA's intent appears to have been to kill or to maim as many people as possible. The IRA's warning was imprecise and its transmission was bungled. It is with profound regret that I remind the House that two people were killed in that blast and many others were injured, some very seriously. My sympathies are very much with them and with their families. Since then, there have been further incidents, further injuries and another death.

My deepest thanks go to the emergency services whose courageous response has done much to limit the carnage planned by the IRA. No new ceasefire has been declared. I remind the House that the most recent bomb exploded without warning—despite the fact that a firm date had been set for the all-party talks, which is what the terrorists profess that they want. Instead, we are told that the IRA is offering another 25 years of bloodshed. The loyalist paramilitaries have indicated that, if there are further IRA outrages, they will match them blow for blow. That is the bleak backdrop to our debate today.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Although my right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right to stress that the Canary wharf incident, and events since then, reinforce the need to renew the Act, did not Mr. Rowe recommend its renewal even while the ceasefire continued? Events at Canary wharf have merely reinforced the need for the measure.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. He expresses Mr. Rowe's recommendation and the Government's position with absolute accuracy.

The powers in the PTA are a necessary part of our armoury in the fight against terrorism. That is why we continue to argue for their renewal, and it is why I do so again today.

As Mr. Rowe's report makes clear, the powers to make exclusion orders deter people from carrying out terrorist acts and deprive the groups to which they belong of some of their experienced operators. The powers to detain, to extend detention under the Act, and to stop, examine and search those coming into or leaving Great Britain or Northern Ireland are equally vital weapons in our armoury. Of the 477 detained under the Act in 1995, 19 were held in connection with international terrorism and the remainder were held in relation to Northern Irish terrorism. Some 121 of those—about 25 per cent.—were subsequently charged with an offence. Of great importance, too, are the powers of the police to investigate terrorist finances and to obtain explanation orders in relation to funds and other information found.

I am aware that the exclusion order provisions are regarded as one of the most contentious parts of the legislation. There are some who, while wholly convinced of the need for other parts of the legislation, are concerned about denying British citizens access to part of their own country. As one who remains proud to call himself a Unionist, I appreciate their misgivings and I have some sympathy with them, but when faced with terrorists who will stop at nothing to achieve their ends—who strike at our most fundamental human rights—we have to accept some measures which, in normal circumstances, we would not countenance.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I support much of what the Home Secretary has said. However, can he explain why the citizens of one part of the United Kingdom must put up with someone walking their streets who is not fit to walk the streets of London because he is assumed to be a bomber or a terrorist? Why should the citizens of Northern Ireland tolerate that?

Mr. Howard: I know that the hon. Lady's view of such matters is different from that of some Labour Members who have intervened in the debate so far. She will know that there are many reasons for that power, one of which—I shall confine myself to only one reason in answering her question—is that, in many circumstances, it can be significantly easier to keep such people under surveillance in one part of the United Kingdom as opposed to another. That is an important way in which terrorism can be fought and combated.

Mr. Rowe's report on the operation of the Act in 1995 points out the need for the exceptional powers. He confirms that the paramilitaries have maintained their command structure and organisation throughout the past 18 months, and that murder, assault, intimidation and coercion have been planned, and carried out, in their name and under their direction. That is why he has concluded that the provisions are still needed and that the Act should therefore be renewed. His report was submitted to me before the IRA's ceasefire came to an end—as my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) said. Mr. Rowe's views must carry even greater force in the changed circumstances in which we now find ourselves.

As hon. Members know, the Government agree with Mr. Rowe's conclusion: it would be sheer folly to allow any of the provisions in the Act to lapse now. If any confirmation were needed, the events of the past few weeks surely put the continuing need for the Act beyond doubt.

Of course, the provisions are not used solely to counter Northern Irish terrorism. Some of the powers can be, and are, used to counter the threat of international terrorism.

Mr. Rowe's report comments on that. The most recent examples are the charges on explosive offences, after detention and extension of detention under the PTA, of those held in connection with the car bombs outside the Israeli embassy and Balfour house in July 1994. In 1995, several Algerians suspected of involvement in terrorist acts were detained under the PTA. One of those detained is currently being held following an extradition request from France. I decided to deport one of the others on national security grounds—in the event, he decided to make a voluntary departure from the United Kingdom and I understand that he was subsequently arrested in France.

Only last week, after I had met the French Interior Minister, he told the press that France owed the successful halt to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group—the GIA—terrorist campaign, in part, to France's co-operation with the United Kingdom. Co-operation between democratic countries is essential if we are to fight terrorism effectively. Last night, a further suspect was arrested in London under an international arrest warrant produced by the French authorities.

Mr. Rowe concludes that, whatever happens in Northern Ireland, there is always likely to be terrorism of an international kind; that the manifestations of it are increasing; and that the need for the Act in order to counter them therefore remains.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Does that mean that the prevention of terrorism Act, or its basic principles, will remain in place even if a permanent peace is established in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Howard: That is precisely why the Government set up the inquiry that is being undertaken by Lord Lloyd of Berwick, which I should like now to consider.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced to the House on 9 January, Lord Lloyd agreed to lead an inquiry to consider whether—and, if so, what—specific counter-terrorist legislation would be required if and when a lasting peace is established in Northern Ireland. His review is under way. Both the PTA and the emergency provisions Act will be examined in the consideration of what may or may not be needed in future. We shall consider his conclusions when his inquiry has been completed. I understand that he hopes to report before the autumn.

The Government's first priority must be to protect the public. To do that, we have to give the police the powers that they need to combat terrorism effectively. The PTA is needed to help prevent the terrorist from taking action and restocking his armoury and to deprive him of funds and a place to hide. I believe that the Act must be renewed for the full period of 12 months that is allowed. I therefore commend the first order to the House.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Home Secretary mentioned the work of the police. Will he enlarge on how, in future, national elements to which he has referred elsewhere, such as a national crime squad and a national criminal intelligence service, will be related to the existing mechanism by which police forces co-operate to fight terrorism through national joint units? A reply from the Minister of State suggests to me that the national joint units will still be in limbo, so it would be helpful to know how the police will be given the structure for the necessary national co-operation.

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman is anticipating the debate that we shall no doubt have when we produce detailed proposals for the national crime squad. The point to which he has referred is clearly relevant to the establishment of that squad, but we shall deal with it at the time. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will understand that I prefer not to anticipate that debate.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Did the Home Secretary see the "Dispatches" programme on Channel 4 last night, in which it was proved that British companies have been involved in the sale of weapons of terror to despotic regimes abroad and that those weapons are used to torture political prisoners? Will the Home Secretary join me in calling for a full investigation to make sure that that does not happen?

Mr. Howard: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Lady, but I did not watch Channel 4 "Dispatches" last night, so I cannot comment on the allegations that were made in it. I am sure, however, that the hon. Lady will take the matter up with whichever of my right hon. Friends is appropriate.

The second item before the House amends the procedures in the PTA that govern the making of exclusion orders. When the European Court of Justice delivered its judgment in the Gallagher case on 30 November, I made it clear in an oral answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) that the judgment did not affect our powers to exclude, but made a limited criticism of the procedures. I said then that we could adapt our procedures without difficulty, and the order does no more than make the necessary changes in the way in which the procedures are carried out.

The power to make exclusion orders may be used only to counter the threat from Northern Irish terrorism and, as Mr. Rowe points out in his report, it has proved a valuable tool over the years in disrupting terrorist plans. Particular individuals can be barred from entering Northern Ireland, Great Britain or the United Kingdom where the Secretary of State is satisfied that they would take advantage of their presence there to commission, prepare or instigate acts of terrorism in connection with the affairs of Northern Ireland. The use of that power not only hampers terrorists' ability to travel but, because their identity and activities are known to the security forces, it limits their overall usefulness to the terrorist organisation to which they belong. Once an organisation becomes aware that the activities of an individual have become known in that way, his usefulness necessarily diminishes.

It has been argued that keeping people under observation would be more effective than exclusion and less of an infringement of their liberties, but the resource implications of mounting a surveillance operation in every case would be enormous and in most cases it is not a realistic proposition.

Others suggest that the process of exclusion is arbitrary and unfair, but Mr. Rowe's report makes it quite clear that it is not. Before any order is made, a considered report is sent to the relevant Department. Mr. Rowe refers to the further scrutiny of the case for exclusion by officials and by the Secretary of State. That scrutiny is robust. Mr. Rowe found that each participant in the process

"approached the task with fairness"

during the year under review.

[Mr. Howard]

There are currently 33 orders in force. As the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) pointed out, that is the lowest number since the power was introduced in 1974. I cannot rule out the possibility that further orders will be made. As now, each case will be considered carefully on its merits.

The need for the exclusion power is proven. It is effective. It is an essential weapon in the counter-terrorist armoury and it would be irresponsible to relinquish it.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Am I right in my interpretation of new regulation 5A(1) of the regulations—that a person may be detained without charge and without suspicion of committing an offence for an indefinite period and, in any event, for more than seven days without any charge being brought against him?

Mr. Howard: I am coming to the detailed provisions of the second order, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the detention powers in it are no greater than the present ones, although the timing is different.

As the House will know, we have already made it clear that certain changes will be made to the procedures governing the making of exclusion orders to bring them into line with European Community law following the ruling of the European Court of Justice last November in the Gallagher case. Those changes are set out in the second order. The regulations are to be made under section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972, which makes special provision to facilitate the amending of legislation to bring United Kingdom law into line with European Community law.

Under the present arrangements, the law requires that where an exclusion order is made, the person affected must be notified of that fact if he is in any part of the United Kingdom. If he wishes to make representations against the order, he has seven days from the date of notification in which to do so, or 14 days if he is outside the jurisdiction from which the order excludes him. Independent advice must be sought once representations are made. An independent adviser is nominated to consider the representations made and the case for exclusion, and to advise the Secretary of State accordingly. His report is taken into account in any decision to confirm or revoke the order.

The House will recall that the European Court found no fault with the substance of the power to exclude when it ruled on the Gallagher case. Its judgment simply requires the Secretary of State to obtain independent advice in every case where he is considering whether to make an exclusion order before the decision is made, rather than shortly after, as he is required to do now if representations are made.

The procedures set out in the regulations, therefore, require the Secretary of State to serve written notice on any person in the United Kingdom against whom he is considering making an exclusion order, to refer the matter for advice to one or more independent persons nominated by him to give advice on such matters and to take into account the advice that he subsequently receives when making his decision. A person who is being served with such a notice may make written representations setting out his objections and can ask to be interviewed by the independent adviser before the latter reports to the Secretary of State.

Historically, persons detained under the Act have often been at an advanced stage of planning a terrorist operation. The decision to arrest them will have been taken either because surveillance has been compromised or because there is uncertainty as to the exact timing of a terrorist attack. That can sometimes mean that the individual is detained before sufficient evidence is available to secure a criminal conviction. In such cases, it is often the case that the police apply for an exclusion order.

Those people can be dangerous, committed terrorists involved in an operation at an advanced stage of planning. It would not be right to release them back into the community pending the procurement and consideration of independent advice.

Mr. Mallon: Will the Home Secretary explain who will appoint the independent advisers?

Mr. Howard: The Secretary of State will appoint them. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman gestures, and the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) laughs. If the exclusion order is to be maintained, what other procedures would they like to see in place? Are they prepared to accept that persons whom I have just described as dangerous, committed terrorists are to be allowed to continue to travel free to commit their acts of terrorism at the expense of innocent people in this United Kingdom of ours? That is the alternative.

Mr. McNamara: My understanding is that, when the Home Secretary informs an individual that he is considering making an order, that person may then be detained with no charge made against him and with no recourse to the court. The individual may make representations within seven days. According to the order, there follows an indefinite period during which an adviser appointed by the Secretary of State will examine the evidence—which the detainee will never be able to see, know the substance of or argue against, and neither will he have the benefit of any legal help. Subsequently, a report will go to the Secretary of State who, without any time limit being imposed, can choose how long it will be before he decides whether to confirm or revoke his proposal. Under that procedure, an individual may be held almost indefinitely—there is no time limit and he or she does not have the normal protection of the law. Secondly—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman has already taken a minute. One question of that length is sufficient at this stage.

Mr. Howard: Detention in the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman described will be an option entirely for the detainee. There is a simple way in which that person can avoid detention.

Mr. McNamara *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman will restrain himself for just a moment, I may explain that the prospective detainee can escape detention by complying with the terms of the exclusion order. If the individual is

prepared to return to Northern Ireland or Great Britain, as the case may be, he will not be detained. If the individual is not prepared to comply and is in the advanced stages of planning or committing a terrorist operation, it is clearly essential that detention powers are available. The hon. Gentleman's summary omitted that regulation 5(2) requires the decision on exclusion to be made as soon as reasonably practicable.

Mr. McNamara: We have seen examples of that before from the Home Secretary.

Mr. Howard: I have not given way again to the hon. Gentleman. If he is fortunate to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no doubt he will make his further points at that time.

I have explained why there is currently a power to detain individuals during the time that an exclusion order is being considered—which is why the new regulations contain a similar power of detention. Under the new procedures it will be possible, if the individual concerned is within the part of the United Kingdom from which consideration is being given to excluding him, to detain him for the period between the serving of the notice and the final decision being taken.

The power to detain is not always used now. It may not always be used in future. Sometimes, the individual is permitted to leave the jurisdiction pending consideration of the case against him. That will be possible in future, but no sensible Government would deny themselves the power to detain murderous criminals while exclusion is under consideration. We will certainly not do so.

All the necessary procedures will be carried out as swiftly as possible but, as will be seen from the regulations, the time it takes for any individual to be interviewed is partly dictated by that person. Individuals will have seven days from the date of the notice, if they are inside the jurisdiction from which consideration is being given to excluding them, in which to make their representations and request an interview.

I began by emphasising our abhorrence at the resumption of the IRA campaign. For 18 months, peace seemed as close as it has ever been in the last 25 years, but the terrorists have returned to the path of murder. The bombs in London serve no purpose. The overwhelming majority of people on both sides of the Irish sea want peace. The IRA has shattered those hopes but the door to peace remains open, and both this Government and the Irish Government continue to explore ways of making progress towards the goal of a comprehensive political settlement in Northern Ireland.

The events of last month have shown yet again that we cannot afford to drop our guard. I do not propose to do so. For the past 12 years, the Labour party has voted against renewal of the PTA. For the two years before that, Labour Members abstained. Before that, they voted for the Act. Now they are doing no more than proposing to return to the position that they adopted when Michael Foot was their leader.

I hope that, even at this late stage, the hon. Member for Blackburn and his hon. Friends will reflect on the matter and support the legislation. Abstention is not enough. Indecision will not do. Governments cannot shrink from deciding whether to take the measures necessary to protect the public from terrorism. We continue to need the emergency powers in the 1989 Act and the order and regulations before the House will give those powers. Once again, I ask the whole House to support them.

5.5 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Terrorism is a modern plague. It randomly destroys the lives of innocent people, and it wrecks families and communities—but terrorism is rarely used randomly. Its aim, almost always, is to disrupt the political process. Some acts of terrorism take place in authoritarian regimes, but they are used as often to undermine democratic countries and the processes by which they seek through peaceful means to resolve conflicts that arise between different peoples or interest groups. The threat to the international community from terrorism is so great that yesterday a summit on that subject alone was held in Egypt.

There is no more appalling example of the immediate and wider consequences that terrorism can bring than the recent bombings of innocent bus passengers in Israel. Although that country is 3,000 miles away, we are all affected by such terrorism. We are directly affected if terrorist organisations also intend to base some of their operations in the United Kingdom or seek support here.

The middle east peace process has been rendered fragile by the resumption of extreme terrorism by Hamas. In the UK, the process to achieve peace in Ireland has been placed under enormous strain by the Provisional IRA's unilateral decision to end its ceasefire and begin a bombing campaign on the mainland. Innocent lives have been lost. Many more people have been physically injured or have suffered great psychological damage. Employment has been disrupted, and millions of pounds' worth of damage has been done to homes, offices and businesses. I join the Home Secretary in condemning those atrocities today, as we did when they occurred.

The police and security forces have again found themselves in the dangerous front line of the fight against terrorism. I place on record our gratitude for their work and the debt that we owe for their bravery and dedication. Fortunately, the disruption caused by the ending of the ceasefire has not aborted the peace process but has strengthened the resolve of all political parties represented in the House and of the Irish Government to work even harder to achieve lasting peace, and the huge benefits that it would bring.

The reality of terrorism, whether international or emanating from within the British Isles, means that special measures must be in place the better to combat terrorism. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made his views clear when he spoke in the renewal order debate two years ago:

> "It is not in dispute, and never has been, that we need anti-terrorist legislation . . . We in the House share a total and complete abhorrence of terrorism and a desire to defeat it."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 300.]

That sentiment has been repeated by me and by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who also said in the emergency provisions Bill debate two months ago that

> "there must be effective counter-terrorist legislation."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 42.]

We have also striven hard to ensure that, in order to deal effectively with terrorism—by the security measures needed to fight it and the political processes required to

[Mr. Jack Straw]

undermine support for it—there is bipartisan agreement across the House. We have achieved such a position on the peace process. Both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have readily acknowledged that the peace process has been immeasurably strengthened by our support for it. I pay tribute to the indefatigable work of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar and her team in that regard. I wish to put it on record that my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar and for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) would have been here, but for the fact that they are in the United States following their duties in the Northern Ireland team.

For at least five years we have also sought means by which there could be all-party agreement on the measures necessary to combat terrorism. In practice, there has been little argument between the parties about four of the six operational parts of what is now the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989—those relating to proscribed organisations, to financial assistance for terrorism and to powers relating to the investigation of terrorist activities, searches for munitions and the control of explosives factories, magazines and stores. There has, however, been argument about the use of certain of the powers relating to arrests, detentions and port controls, and overwhelming objections to the principle of exclusion orders.

Five years ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), then shadow Home Secretary, made proposals for what he described as a "fundamental re-examination" of the prevention of terrorism Acts to achieve

"a demonstration of common purpose".—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1991; Vol. 187, c. 39.]

on anti-terrorist legislation. Those were turned down.

Two years ago, the late John Smith, with my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), made a further sustained effort to achieve that demonstration of common purpose. Private discussions to achieve that common purpose were held with Ministers, but those private discussions were aborted when their details were leaked. That leak did not come from the Opposition.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that the original exclusion order was brought in by a Labour Government and was supported by the Labour party until 1983? The hon. Gentleman is using weasel words to cover up the differences in his party. Does he agree with comments in *The Guardian* that his argument is entirely inconsistent? By abstaining on the order, he reveals himself as still soft on terrorism.

Mr. Straw: I confirm the first part of what the hon. Gentleman said, which is a matter of fact. I advise him never to take too much notice of what *The Guardian* says, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—had he remained in his place—would also advise him. As I will explain, there are good reasons for the position that the Labour party took earlier in this decade and in the 1980s.

Despite the way in which discussions into which we had entered in good faith were aborted as a result of the leaking of details about them—not by the Opposition, as I have said—my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield, in the debate two years ago, repeated the offer

"that has been made to the Government . . . to try to reach a consensus on the issue, take it out of the political divide and resolve it properly."

He continued:

"One way to achieve that would be to undertake a full and independent review of the judicial process"—

of the PTA—

"under a senior respected figure".—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 300-309.]

Last year, in the more encouraging climate of the ceasefire, my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar and I renewed those efforts to secure the establishment of such a review. Again, the approaches were not reciprocated by the Government by the time of the debate, which took place almost exactly a year ago. This time last year, I said:

"Three things . . . are in dispute: the power to make exclusion orders, which are a form of internal exile; the absence of a judicial element in decisions to extend detention; and, above all . . . the need for a general and comprehensive review of anti-terrorist legislation."

I continued:

"Had such a review been announced, and had it been able to take into account our concerns in relation to the first two matters that I raised, we should not have voted against the order tonight".

I repeated that point, so that there was no doubt about it, on two other occasions in my speech.

I regret that it has taken so long for the review we sought to be announced and for the foundations to be laid—as the review will achieve—for bipartisan agreement. The review we sought has now been announced and it follows directly from what I said last year that we should not vote against the measures tonight. Indeed, that was the reason why we did not vote against the Third Reading of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill on 19 February 1996, despite the fact that it contained measures to reintroduce internment in principle.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): But did not the hon. Gentleman and his party vote against the Second Reading of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill on the very day the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced a review? Is he not therefore talking absolute nonsense when he says that the reason for the change in his position today, for an all-party approach, is that we have announced a review?

Mr. Straw: No is the answer to that question. What I have said is entirely consistent with what I said last year:

"Had such a review been announced, and had it been able to take into account our concerns in relation to the first two matters that I raised, we should not have voted against the order tonight".—[*Official Report*, 8 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 357.]

Sir Ivan Lawrence: You voted against the emergency provisions Bill.

Mr. Straw: We did not vote against the emergency provisions Bill. We voted for a reasoned amendment which we had tabled and we did not vote against the Third Reading. The hon. and learned Gentleman needs to get his facts right before he asks further questions.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has accused my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) of not getting his facts right, so let us make it clear what the record shows. Will the

hon. Gentleman confirm that, on the day my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced the general review and after that review had been announced, the Opposition voted against the Second Reading of the Bill? The hon. Gentleman does not seem to know what his party did on that occasion, but I can tell him that it voted against the Second Reading of that Bill.

Mr. Straw: We voted for a reasoned amendment, as I understand it. I was not actually present and I did not vote either way on that occasion. I know that, on 19 February on the Third Reading of the Bill, there was no vote at all in the House.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): The hon. Gentleman may have been gratified to hear the BBC glorifying his party's apparent change of heart, after 13 years, about voting against the order tonight. The story that the BBC should have reported is that, in spite of the recent bombing and the breakdown of the ceasefire, the Opposition are still not prepared to support these measures. Where is the consistency in anything that the hon. Gentleman has said so far?

Mr. Straw: I have explained, on more than one occasion, that we have sought a bipartisan agreement on measures for the prevention of terrorism, as we have given bipartisan support for the peace process. But there is a difference. We have been able to achieve bipartisan support for the peace process because we have been able to have effective, constructive discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about that process. No such discussions have been remotely possible with the Home Secretary, who appears to believe that bipartisan agreement can arise only when a proposition is laid on the table and we have to take it or leave it.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has made some allegations about me, so perhaps I may put another question to him. He attaches enormous importance to the review, which he says is the reason why his party has changed its position, and he is relying on it in his increasingly desperate attempt to preserve some semblance of unity in his party's position. Is the hon. Gentleman aware—I made it perfectly clear in my earlier remarks—that the review that we have asked Lord Lloyd to undertake is a review of the powers that will be needed if and when there is a permanent peace in Northern Ireland? It is a review of the powers that we will need against international terrorism or any other domestic terrorism, but specifically not Irish terrorism because it is predicated on the basis that there will be peace in Northern Ireland. The review has, therefore, precious little to do with the subject matter of today's debate.

Mr. Straw: That is entirely wrong. The terms of reference of the Lloyd review refer to the future need for specific counter-terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom if the cessation of violence leads to a lasting peace. I made exactly that point this time last year when I called for a review. I said that the review should be established on the Government's working assumption that the cessation of violence led to a lasting peace. So the review that has been established is the review that we sought—whether my hon. Friends like it or not.

Mr. McNamara: My hon. Friend has agreed with the Secretary of State that the review is predicated on a cessation of violence in Northern Ireland, and upon its continuation. Lord Lloyd is not looking at the situation since the breakdown of the ceasefire. The whole premise of the review has in one sense been knocked away by the IRA restarting its activities. So what Lord Lloyd is doing is of no relevance to the renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act—a point that I have made in the past to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Straw: When we called for a review last year we said that it should be established by a High Court judge or someone of similar standing, and that it should be carried out on the Government's working assumption that the ceasefire had led to a permanent cessation of violence. It is our judgment that the terms of reference of the Lloyd review meet the conditions that I specified last year. What I said then is clear for anyone to see. Despite the fact that the PIRA has abandoned the cessation of violence, the Lloyd review continues and he has invited my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar and me, among many others, to give evidence.

Mr. Mallon: Just to help us make up our minds, may I point out that there have been numerous reviews down the years? Lord Jellicoe, Lord Shackleton, Sir Cyril Phillips, Lord Gardiner, Lord Colville, Sir George Baker and John Rowe have all carried out reviews, but none of them dealt with the central points that the hon. Gentleman has identified and their recommendations were not adopted by Government. How can anyone therefore place any faith in the Lloyd review or believe that it will come up with the type of conclusions that I would like to see?

Mr. Straw: I can only repeat what I have already said. We proposed last year that the review be established on the basis of the Government's working assumption that the cessation of violence was permanent. My statement was made in good faith when the ceasefire was holding. Despite the fact that it has broken down—we hope only temporarily—the review is still going forward and we intend to give evidence to it. It remains the firm hope of every Member of the House that the ceasefire will return, that the PIRA will end its bombing campaign and that the reviews can then take place in the circumstances that we and the Government expected when they were first announced.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not wish to mislead the House. Now that his hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) has been able to refresh his memory from the *Hansard* report of the debate on the Northern Ireland Bill, held on 9 January 1996—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is for hon. Members themselves to decide whether they have misled the House, not for other Members to pontificate at length before even reaching what may or may not have been a point of order.

Sir Ivan Lawrence *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have made that quite clear. Mr. Straw.

Mr. Straw: I think I can help the hon. and learned Gentleman. I was misinformed about our position on

[Mr. Straw]

Second Reading. We did vote against Second Reading, and I apologise to the House for that error. In the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar made it clear that we welcomed the establishment of the Lloyd review and that we would seek further changes to the EPA in Committee. She also said that we would not vote against Third Reading, and that we did not do.

Although the Act which the House is invited tonight to review dates from 1989, the original Act dates from autumn 1974. It passed through all its stages in this House and the other place in the near record time of 48 hours, following the carnage of the Birmingham pub bombings. The then Home Secretary justified the need for the legislation on the ground that the country faced a highly exceptional situation and a clear and present danger. The powers, Roy Jenkins told the House, were draconian and unprecedented in peacetime. In consequence, Parliament required what have amounted to annual audits of the use of the Act's powers, and that it be subject to annual renewal.

It was also to the great credit of the Labour Government that two more fundamental reviews of the provisions of the Act were conducted by the distinguished figures of Lord Gardiner and then Lord Shackleton. By contrast, until the Lloyd review was announced only one other fundamental review of the Act's provisions has been held under this Administration—the one by Viscount Colville in 1987. That review had been preceded by mounting disquiet, dating back many years in this House and outside it, at the way in which some of the PTA powers were being used, especially those relating to examinations at ports, detentions and their extension, and exclusions from the mainland or from Northern Ireland.

Many complaints were made by my right hon. and hon. Friends on behalf of constituents with family connections in Ireland whose travel to and from different parts of the same kingdom were subject to the hazards and humiliations of unjustified stops and detentions. It was also said that the other powers in the Act were used unjustifiably.

Mr. Howard: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman a little more with the events of 9 January this year. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) said:

"We will vote twice against the legislation today, as we did in 1991. It is important to be consistent."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 47.]

Did she consult him before using those words?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend referred to the position that we took in 1991. She also made it clear that we welcomed the establishment of the Lloyd review and would not vote against Third Reading.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) and many others used to make the point that this sort of experience of the use of the powers, and the sense of injustice that it engendered, perversely assisted recruitment to terrorist organisations and helped to feed the lie peddled so assiduously in the United States that British justice was no justice when it came to the treatment of Irish people. The results of those concerns and of the Colville review have been that the powers in the Act have been more sparingly and judiciously used in recent years, as we heard from the Secretary of State. The number of detentions fell from 857 in 1979 to one sixth of that number, 145, in 1993, the last full year before the ceasefire came into effect.

Just 8 per cent. of those detained in 1980 were charged with any offence. By 1993 the proportion had risen to 20 per cent. If I heard the Secretary of State aright, I believe that it is now up to 25 per cent. Those figures are salutary. Far from the much more limited use of the Act's powers undermining the fight against terrorism, they have strengthened that fight with a much higher arrest rate and with the removal of some of the grounds for complaint about the injustice of the Act.

As I spelt out last year, however, there are still concerns about the absence of a judicial element in decisions to extend detention and about the very principle of exclusion orders. Under the normal criminal law in England and Wales, a suspect may be arrested and detained by police for up to 36 hours, and that detention may then be extended by a further two and a half days, making four days in all. In contrast, under the PTA, the initial detention period is 48 hours. That detention may be extended for a further five days by the Secretary of State, and not by any judicial figure. It is in the nature of powers needed to deal with terrorism that swift decisions may have to be made, and that the basis of such decisions may be intelligence or other evidence that would be inadmissible in a court of law. These considerations strengthen rather than weaken the case for decisions to extend detention to be made with the utmost fairness and to be seen to be fair. In our view, that must require a judicial element.

The current situation is unsatisfactory. That was recognised seven years ago by the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), the then Home Secretary. He said that the Government continued to look "for a judicial mechanism." Perhaps I have missed something in the argument, but I do not begin to understand why that search has produced a blank.

The argument advanced in this year's audit by Mr. John Rowe is unconvincing. He has recited the circumstances in which a judge would work. He tells us that the suspect could not be given all the detail of the evidence against him, that the judge could not give reasons for his judgment and that there would be no right of appeal. Mr. Rowe then claimed that the judge, in such circumstances, would be acting

"in name only. He would be exercising a function which could be called judicial only because he happened to be a judge by his profession and occupation. And the judge would in this situation would have every appearance of being an arm of the Executive."

In other words, Mr. Rowe was asserting that a judge could bring nothing to the process, and that the only consequence of his role would be to compromise his judicial integrity. If that were so, we would never ask judges to make decisions except in open court. Yet Mr. Rowe admits that there are plenty of examples where judges do not have to make decisions in open court, where they make them in secret on evidence that cannot be disclosed to the defendant.

As the House discussed two weeks ago on Second Reading of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill, that is exactly the position when it comes to dealing with sensitive evidence—for example, the identity of an informant covered by a public interest immunity

certificate, where the defendant may not even know that an application to the judge has been made, still less what it contains.

Increasingly over the years, to provide greater public confidence in the fairness of procedures that necessarily have to operate in secrecy, the House has asked senior members of the judiciary to supervise parts of the work of the intelligence and security agencies. No one doubts the independence of mind and spirit of Lord Nolan, yet one of his tasks is to act as interception commissioner in the operation of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 to check whether telephone taps and other intercepts have been properly authorised. In those circumstances, Lord Nolan has not acted as a judge in name only; nor have his integrity and public reputation been compromised in any way as he has undertaken that task.

There is the example of Mr. Rowe, who is brought in to act, in a judicial capacity, to check retrospectively the use of the Act's powers. Moreover, Ministers have voluntarily assented to treaties and conventions which require that there should be an independent element in decisions, as the decision of the European Court of Justice in the Gallagher case demonstrated.

The state has no greater coercive power than the deprivation of liberty. Even in the grave circumstances of the fight against terrorism—indeed, especially in those circumstances—it is wrong that decisions should be made by Ministers alone.

Exclusion orders apply only to Irish terrorism. They have been justified on the ground that they are a necessary part of measures that are needed to fight terrorism by denying certain individuals entry to one or other parts of the United Kingdom, so disrupting terrorists' organisational and supply lines. That was the case advanced by the Home Secretary. The orders, however, are a form of internal exile, last practised, I understand, in this country in the time of Henry VIII. When such exile was practised in the former Soviet Union, it was subject to round condemnation by the international community.

The effects of exclusion orders are bizarre. After all, we are one kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Yet the orders mean that a suspected terrorist who is regarded as so dangerous that he is not allowed anywhere in England, Scotland and Wales is allowed freely to walk the streets of Northern Ireland. In reverse, a suspect can be banned from Belfast but still be free in Birmingham.

For all that the Home Secretary said in support of exclusion orders, he omitted to mention that when there was last a fundamental review of the PTA, conducted by Lord Colville, the outcome was a settled conclusion on exclusion orders. Lord Colville described the orders as

"the most draconian in the present Act".

Having considered the security arguments in favour of exclusion orders, he said:

"However, I am not convinced that the ends justify these means . . . exclusion orders should not be renewed or replaced."

That would be the correct decision, he continued,

"both in terms of civil rights in the United Kingdom, and this country's reputation in that respect among the international community".

Those were prescient words. The continued use of exclusion orders has harmed our reputation abroad and written endless speeches for the apologists for terrorism. It has led also to Britain ending up on the wrong side of international laws to which we have assented.

Mr. Barnes: Is it not also unacceptable that the IRA operates a form of external exclusion order, the exercise of which means that many citizens of Northern Ireland are kept out of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Straw: I accept entirely what my hon. Friend has said.

We remain implacably opposed to exclusion orders, and shall be saying so in our evidence to the Lloyd review. I hope that the Government will reconsider their support for the orders. They have, by their actions, recognised the force of the arguments against the orders. The number in force, as we heard from the Home Secretary, is the lowest ever. Only four were made in 1993, the last full year before the ceasefire, compared with nearly four times that number in 1987.

Moreover, it now appears that some of those who are involved in the making of exclusion orders now have serious misgivings about them. In his 1994 audit, Mr. Rowe stated simply that police officers had told him that the orders "have a real value". There is, however, a more quantified story in Mr. Rowe's latest audit. He states that the

"overwhelming majority of port officers . . . gave me the answer that these orders are useful and should be retained."

But he continued by stating that

"there was a fair number of officers, of all ranks, who held the opposite view".

He explained that the opposite view was that

"a known and experienced member of . . . terrorist organisations can be noticed at port and followed thereafter, and kept under surveillance."

We now know from Mr. Rowe's report that a number of people in the security services are questioning the value of exclusion orders. The only argument in favour of the orders was their utility. If even that is now being questioned, it is surely time for us to agree to abandon their use altogether.

Whatever sincere but differing views Members may take about the merits of the renewal order, the House is united in its determination to fight terrorism with every means that is consistent with a democratic nation whose constitution is based on the rule of law. It is the Opposition's fervent hope that the Lloyd review will be the means by which we can at last achieve bipartisan agreement on the measures necessary to fight the scourge of terrorism.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that Back Benchers' speeches are restricted to 10 minutes.

5.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I shall be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) should understand that he fails to convince on two important points. First, he fails to demonstrate any error in our

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

assumption that the greatest threat to civil liberties lies with terrorist activity rather than anti-terrorist legislation. The second flaw in his argument is that he gives insufficient attention to the fact that exclusion orders have a vital operational value in that they can interrupt the command and communications structure of terrorists and thus save life. For that reason, reluctantly, we accept the infringement of civil liberties that exclusion orders represent.

On the wider issues, I have three observations to make. The first relates to the Rowe report as a whole. The essential point to note is that it is entirely unequivocal: it is precise, and there are no ifs and buts. It states that the prevention of terrorism Act was operated effectively and properly in 1995 and that there is a continuing need for its existence in the next 12 months. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) pointed out in an intervention that Mr. Rowe came to his conclusions at a time when the IRA was still operating its ceasefire, so they are that much more valid now that we have moved out of that era. By any criteria, the House would be entirely wrong and would be acting indefensibly and irresponsibly if it did anything other than support the measure as amended with regard to exclusion orders.

Secondly, perhaps the most significant aspect of Mr. Rowe's report this year is the emphasis that he gives to the dimension of international terrorism. There has too often been a tendency on the part of politicians and commentators to regard the PTA exclusively in the context of Northern Ireland. That was always mistaken. The statistics speak for themselves: more than 21 per cent. of the people who were detained under either the 1984 or 1989 Act and who were subsequently charged were involved in international terrorism. In some years, the figure was much higher, and in one year—1987—the totals of those involved in international and Northern Ireland terrorism were virtually identical.

Mr. Rowe provides a useful potted history of the various PTAs and shows that from 1974—when the first of these Acts was introduced—through to 1976 and then to 1984, they always contained the provision to counter international terrorism. The provision was not specifically identified until the later two Acts, but those Acts were consistent with that intention from the very start.

Mr. Rowe reminds us that the Lockerbie incident occurred only just over seven years ago, that it is not yet two years since the attack on the Israeli embassy and Balfour house, and that last year 50 per cent. of the extensions of detention related to international terrorism. It is vital that we do not lose sight of that essential fact and that we continue to have on the statute book legislation which will enable a democratic society to respond to the ever-present threat of international terrorism, regardless of the situation in Northern Ireland.

Thirdly, I must express a slight concern. I noted Mr. Rowe's favourable and reassuring comments about the funding of terrorism and the investigation of it. He pointed out in paragraphs 39 to 42 that there have been convictions under sections 9 and 10, and that greater use was made in 1995 of schedule 7 with regard to the making of search warrants and so on, but my concern is that perhaps the powers that we have on the statute book do not go far enough and cannot deal with one particular issue—that of fund-raising on the part of the non-proscribed political wings of proscribed organisations.

The arguments are long and detailed so I shall say only that non-proscribed organisations can legally raise money which is channelled not necessarily into acts of terrorism—which would be contrary to the PTA—but into promoting the ideology and stance of terrorist or proscribed organisations. I hope that the Lloyd inquiry will deal with terrorist financing or promote the opportunity for wider debate because I do not believe that we have yet got to grips with it.

As I said, I believe that the House would be entirely mistaken if it did anything other than support the measure.

5.44 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I am sorry that the Home Secretary chose to begin the debate in the way that he did because he is playing politics, which is rather sad and not something that the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would so easily have done.

The Home Secretary spoke about the vote last year and said that it took place at the time of the Heathrow bombs. He said that we should face down the terrorists. If, after 25 years of violence, I believed that we could face them down simply by voting, I would vote with him every time. The problem is that we need to do something more sophisticated than facing down the terrorists.

The Home Secretary and one or two other hon. Members accused my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) of inconsistency. They should watch what they say. They have been asking for cross-party support on Northern Ireland, and they will get it because we believe in the peace, but there is nothing more inconsistent than the Government condemning IRA terrorism year after year while at the same time talking to it without the House's knowledge—and I do not mean Sinn Fein: I mean the IRA. A party that talks to the IRA but then lectures us on being inconsistent has a substantial lesson to learn. The Unionists and the SDLP know that, and most of us know it, too. It is time that the Home Secretary talked to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister, who are handling the situation with a great deal more sophistication than he is.

In response to an intervention, the Home Secretary said that there were no political prisoners. I agree. A long time ago, during the hunger strike, I argued—when it was not popular to do so—that there were no political prisoners. Why? Because in this country, laws are made democratically and there is an independent judiciary to put them into effect. There can be political prisoners only when that is not the case. As an ex-probation officer, I knew that people from varying backgrounds would claim political status when they were not entitled to it and when it had nothing whatever to do with Ireland.

The Home Secretary does devastating damage to his case by justifying under the prevention of terrorism Act the power of a politician to impose internal exile and, at times, to detain. That is why there is so much concern among some hon. Members about the nature of the PTA. I am in favour of civil liberties, but the argument is not only about such liberties—it is about two fundamental concepts. The first is the rule of law and the second is how most effectively we can fight terrorism.

I shall explain why I am prepared to abstain this evening, having voted against the measure on previous occasions, and I urge my hon. Friends to do the same. The situation is changing. If the Government had the wit,

they would have told the House that they accept what Lord Colville said in 1987, that there is internal exile, that we know that we have to get rid of it and that is why the numbers in internal exile have dropped and are so low. That is why the Home Secretary should get rid of the exclusion orders. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said, senior police officers know that, in view of the small numbers involved, it would be more effective to use the security services, MI5 and MI6.

The worst argument that the Home Secretary could have used was that of resource implications. For heaven's sake—we have been spending billions of pounds in Northern Ireland to deal with terrorism, and the Irish Government have been doing the same. Are we seriously saying for the sake of four exclusion orders that we would not use a method which does not so much override the rule of law? If MI5 and MI6 can do the job, as I believe that they can, we should let them do it.

Let us not be dragged before international courts that we helped to establish. British lawyers wrote the laws for the European Court of Justice. We set it up, but then we allow ourselves to be dragged before it because the Home Secretary cannot move on one key issue and say that exclusion orders must go.

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Mr. Soley: I will give way briefly as I am under pressure of time.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman referred to the European Court of Justice without mentioning that it upheld the substance of exclusion orders and found that they are entirely in accordance with our obligations under the European convention on human rights. The change that it asked us to make, and which we have made, relates simply to the adaptation of the procedures. On the substance of exclusion orders, the European Court of Justice found in the Government's favour. The fact that there are now so few exclusion orders shows that we use them only when we need to do so.

Mr. Soley: I think that I should claim injury time for that intervention.

The derogation that Britain seeks is intensely damaging and the Government know it. They know that we get more convictions before the European Court of Justice than almost any other European country and we cannot claim otherwise, as we used to be able to do. As one who was brought up to be proud of our parliamentary democracy and the rule of law in Britain, I do not like to see us in that position. It is legislation such as this that does that damage.

The Home Secretary is moving and he should admit it. The figures are coming down dramatically, although that is nothing to do with the ceasefire; it was happening before that. The figures are also coming down dramatically, as the Home Secretary could have said, in another area that is so damaging in the fight against terrorism—the number of people detained but not charged. At one time, as many as 95 per cent. of people detained under the Act were not charged. Can anyone think of any other Act of Parliament under which that would be acceptable? Of course not. Yet that is what we are doing under this legislation.

The figures have dropped dramatically, but the percentages are still worrying. The one area where they have not dropped is also an area where there has not been a move to the benefit of the fight against terrorism and I would ask the Home Secretary to consider it. A growing number of people are not held under a detention order, but simply questioned for fewer than four hours and then released. I am not convinced that the Home Secretary wants to help, but if he does, he should ensure that those figures are also reduced, just as the number of detentions and exclusion orders have been reduced.

This is a fight for hearts and minds. To those Conservative Members who doubt that, I simply say that some years ago I was held for several hours and cross-examined by the East German police when East Germany was still a communist state. I did not know it at the time, but they were worried because I had in my possession an unsigned cheque belonging to a German who was in fact a distant relative and who had given it to me as a present. One can dine out on a story like that for years.

One of the tragedies is that it is not only people who are held under these Acts and then released without charge who become alienated, but their families and friends. That is why I welcome the drop in numbers. In other words, the prevention of terrorism Act—a deeply undesirable Act, as even the Home Secretary seemed to admit in one of his more radical moments—is being used far less often and, in a way, rather more specifically than it was before.

If the Home Secretary had done what many of his predecessors had done and come to the House and said, "Fortunately, I have been able dramatically to cut the use of the Act and I will review it as well," many people would have said, "Hear, hear—well done, Home Secretary, keep on doing that." But he did not. He came with the intention of scoring a few cheap political points and then told everyone that he was proud of being a Conservative and Unionist. Some people would dearly love to recreate the old Conservative and Unionist party, and I know why. But I tell the Home Secretary this: he can never be a Unionist when he says that Northern Ireland is to be treated so totally and utterly differently from the rest of the United Kingdom, that people can be excluded there in the form of internal exile that the Government support. The SDLP and the Official Unionist and Democratic Unionist parties will tell the Home Secretary that that is to treat Northern Ireland as a second-class citizen and not as a proper part of the United Kingdom, so the Home Secretary should not come to the House claiming to be a Unionist and expecting to have Unionist support, because he will not even get it there, where he seeks it most.

I have been opposed to this legislation for many years. The legislation cannot be temporary when it has run for more than 20 years, and we know it. It is deeply offensive to the rule of law and to Britain's tradition of democracy. The numbers being scooped up in its net have changed dramatically over the years and we need to recognise that. It should have been a collection of information Act, because that is what it does and that is the way in which it works. It has not necessarily prevented much terrorism. It has at times, I accept, but it has also acted as one of the best recruiting serjeant majors the IRA could have wished for, enabling the IRA to claim—wrongly, in my judgment—that it could not get justice in British courts.

[Mr. Soley]

We are moving in the right direction, slowly. I hope that Lord Lloyd produces a more fundamental and better analysis than Mr. Rowe. I am not happy with the Rowe report. Its presentation of facts and figures is not good and some other things are missing. But I hope that my hon. Friends will abstain tonight and I hope that the Home Secretary listened to my remarks with care.

5.54 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Throughout last year, I spent a lot of time trying to convince myself that we were moving to a situation where these powers were no longer necessary. If I understand Mr. Rowe correctly, however, he tells me in paragraphs 13 and 14 why I was completely wrong to take that view. It bears thinking carefully about. He says:

"The proscribed organisations still maintain their structure and organisation, and murders and assaults are carried out in their name."

He continues:

"Explosive devices have been found: a new mortar device has been developed . . . there is movement of arms about the country . . . Considerable amounts of firearms and explosives are still in the hands of the proscribed organisations and ready for use. Training goes on, and there is still some recruiting".

It is important to note that that was written at a time when there was a ceasefire, not the time after Canary wharf. It is therefore not Canary wharf and what has happened since that makes the renewal necessary. The PTA will remain necessary even if the temporary ceasefire is reinstated.

I want to take a moment or so to explain why I believe that to be the case. I have never had any real doubt that the ceasefire was a temporary truce and a sham. At the very moment when Gerry Adams was shaking Clinton's hand, his friends were building the Canary wharf bomb. The purpose of the Sinn Fein-IRA temporary truce, therefore, was not to help phase out terrorism but to exploit our weakness and to buy time to reorganise and re-equip.

Sinn Fein-IRA has always been and remains, despite its words, a Marxist terrorist group, committed to obtaining by any means at its disposal—including violence—that which it believes in. I still see no sign of willingness on its part to compromise in any way. We therefore have no alternative but to renew the prevention of terrorism Act. Making one-sided compromise after one-sided compromise is no alternative to the PTA. Not only is treating bombers and assassins as though they were democrats not an alternative to the PTA—it is a despicable affront to the people of Northern Ireland.

Even when one accepts the need to renew the PTA, there is a temptation in a debate such as this to focus on whether we need to retain all the powers or whether, as we have just heard, some powers could be phased out. That is not what we should be considering. We should be asking ourselves what more we can do, not what less we can do, to root out terrorism. Mr. Rowe makes it crystal clear that we need each and every one of the powers that we currently have.

One can go through the entire list—proscribing organisations, exclusion orders, investigating funding, section 14 arrests, extension of detention, the port powers and the new powers that were given last year. Mr. Rowe makes it crystal clear that the PTA is needed and that every power in it has his backing. He recommends that we renew them all.

Canary wharf and everything that has happened since therefore confirms not just the need for the Act, but the need to do more. In starting that debate on how to do more, how to extend the PTA and even the emergency powers legislation, we must begin by saying an emphatic simple no to the men of violence. There can be no compromise with evil. That is what the PTA is all about. All terrorists and their apologists must be totally excluded from the entire democratic process unless and until they renounce their terrorism and unless and until they hand over their arms and explosives. Having said that firm no, then—and only then—can we turn to the detailed debate about doing more. That is why I welcome Lord Lloyd's review, and I very much hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, when he winds up the debate, will assure me that Lord Lloyd will not only consider retaining existing powers but will be encouraged to consider additional steps to stamp out terrorism and to bear down on it rather than compromise with it.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilshire: No. I am very sorry, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to disagree with me when he makes his speech.

I end by saying a few words about the Labour party and its decision to abstain, which it wants us to believe is proof that it is tough on terrorism. What signal does the Labour party believe that that sends? What signal does it send when it does not have the guts to have an opinion? I gather that what I see as a spineless gesture of abstention is intended to avoid giving Sinn Fein-IRA an excuse to bomb. Have the Opposition not noticed that Sinn Fein-IRA does not need an excuse to bomb? It has been bombing for the past 25 years, and it promises us another 25 years whether or not the Opposition vote today: it does not need an excuse.

Mr. Soley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilshire: No, I shall not. I am very sorry.

Mr. Soley *rose—*

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes. I now hope that he will let me have mine.

I believe that there is only one honourable course at the end of the debate: to vote one way or the other. I believe passionately that voting in favour of renewal of the pRevention of terrorism Act is the right thing to do. That said, I am willing to admit that I respect the integrity of those who have the guts to vote against it.

6.1 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Liberal Democrats will vote in favour of the renewal of the legislation tonight, as we have in previous years. We shall not abstain.

Since voting similarly last year, there has, of course, been a resumption of the IRA's bombing campaign, with all the terrible results that flow from that. Any ceasefire,

even if it were still in operation, would have some uncertainty about it. An industry of violence has developed in Northern Ireland around the paramilitary organisations. There are, indeed, people who have a habit of violence, which the organisations seem to be having some difficulty in controlling. I have my suspicions that at least some of the assaults and attacks that took place during the ceasefire were carried out by members of the IRA who had nothing better to do and whose determination to continue using violence was channelled into those supposedly disciplinary activities, which, of course, had no shred of justice or legality associated with them. They were a form of intimidation.

Even if the ceasefire were continuing, we would have to keep in place some emergency measures for quite some time. As the Lloyd inquiry assumes, we would need, for the foreseeable future, some anti-terrorist provisions of wider application, which are relevant to other forms of terrorism that are happening around the world and that have some effect in this country.

Mr. Barnes: The IRA has suggested that it may engage in another 25 years of terrorism. Does that mean that the principles that are currently contained in the prevention of terrorism Act and to which the Opposition object so strongly should be in place for another 25 years? Would that help the process?

Mr. Beith: It means that the character of the legislation that we would have for the next 25 years would be influenced by the background of security that it was intended to deal with. It is difficult to speculate about whether the precise powers in the order would continue to prove useful or whether we would need others, which might involve other incursions into civil liberty. Civil liberties in this country will be damaged for as long as a terrorist organisation targets citizens as a means to exert political power. That is utterly deplorable, but it is a harsh reality.

We do not like this legislation, as it involves a curtailment of civil liberties, but bombs in cities curtail civil liberties absolutely and utterly. Therefore, we have to find ways in which to combat those who bring bombs, while minimising the risk to the civil liberties of others, recognising, however, that the threat to most of our citizens is profound. How far can we contest and combat terrorism and maintain our civil liberties? To a large extent, I hope.

What must be clear, of course, is that the legislation and what we keep on the statute book to deal with terrorism is not a part of the negotiating process. It is not part of attempting to secure a renewed ceasefire. It is the subject neither of threats nor of concessions. It is simply what we feel we have to do to protect our citizens. We should neither ease it to obtain concessions from the other side, nor, indeed, attempt to portray it more harshly in the belief that that will somehow frighten or intimidate. We judge it against the clear security background of what is necessary to protect our citizens.

We very much welcome the fact that the Lloyd review is taking place. It is what we asked for. It is a wide-ranging review. The Home Secretary, in his anxiety to make a different point, may have appeared to restrict the significance of Northern Ireland in the Lloyd review. I think that he was trying to make the point that much in the present situation cannot be resolved by the Lloyd review, because he is looking to a period in which we can assume that a long-term peace has been secured. That seemed to imply that Lord Lloyd is not concerned about Northern Ireland; he is, of course.

Any long-term view must take into account the fact that the possibility of any ceasefire will produce dissident elements who may be willing to resume acts of terrorism. We may need legislation on the statute book to cope with that. Lord Lloyd will have to consider what elements of the legislation will need to be in place in the longer term. We have talked to him about that already and expect to do so further. As was implicit in my reply to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), there will be problems even if we secure what we hope is a long-term peace, because there will always be those with the possibility of disrupting that peace.

We particularly dislike exclusion orders, to which much reference has been made tonight, and increasingly they are seen to have limited value. The resumption of hostilities on the mainland is, perhaps, the least propitious moment to bring about the final removal of exclusion orders from the mechanisms of counter-terrorism, but it is something that we should consider as soon as possible.

I regard the new procedure, following the Gallagher case, as an improvement. There is an argument to be made about whether it is a good idea to have a judge. It is important that we have someone who is seen to be independent. Judges carry out such work in relation to interception of communications, and their standing gives greater authority to what they do. I do not believe that it has to be a judge. Much hearsay evidence has to be considered in those matters, so we should not pretend that it is a judicial process. It is an independent review of the Executive, and it must be seen to be so. The detention element arises in part from the existence of an appeal procedure. The possibility of people being detained, when it remains possible that they will be allowed to go wherever they want, exists because they are able to challenge what the Home Secretary might otherwise do, which was not previously possible.

It is not a happy state of affairs, and it is not something that I want to keep on the statute book, but as long as it is there, I would like greater safeguards than there have been hitherto, so I support the second order, which provides that.

Detention for up to seven days is an unwelcome feature of this legislation. It is sometimes adversely compared with countries that allow longer detention without charge than is normal under our system. Nevertheless, I would not want to see it as a long-term part of our counter-terrorism legislation, because it has damaging effects, which the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) described, when it impinges on people who have no involvement in violence or terrorism.

The legislation contains uncontroversial provisions with which we do not wish to dispense—for instance, the provisions relating to the control of explosives, fund-raising and the confiscation of funds. There has been a good deal of public discussion about whether funds are being raised for terrorism in the middle east, and whether Hamas has channels for funds in this country. I hope that, if appropriate, the powers in the Act will be used to deal with any such developments.

[Mr. Beith]

The Home Secretary spoke of the work of the police and the Security Service, which have a key role in the fight against terrorism. As I said when we discussed the Security Services Bill, there must be no let-up in the counter-terrorism work of the Security Service for as long as the current bombing campaign continues. I would be worried by any significant transfer of personnel from such work to dealing with organised crime: in the present circumstances, the counter-terrorism campaign should be an absolute priority for the Security Service.

In a similar debate last year, I said that it would be irresponsible to scrap the anti-terrorism legislation entirely, with immediate effect. That is what would have happened if a vote against the Government had been carried that night. I said then that we would vote to renew the Act, although we would continue to demand a general review of its working. Now that there is to be a general review, I feel even more determined that we should ensure that the legislation remains on the statute book, while working for a peace that will mean that at some point in the future our counter-terrorism legislation can make fewer incursions on civil liberties, and can be more directed towards some of the longer-term terrorist threats that will probably always exist.

We must constantly strive to achieve a balance between protecting our citizens from the total destruction of their civil liberties that being bombed, shot or maimed involves, and ensuring that, in providing such protection, we do not create some aspects of the society that the terrorists are wishing on us. We must ensure that we do not further their interests by reducing our civil liberties. Some terrorists, indeed, use the exploitation of the loss of civil liberties as one of their political tools. The more they think that they can make a country ungovernable, the more they think that they can exercise political power from the barrel of a gun or from their bomb-making activities.

That is a difficult balance for any Government to strike, and we shall continue to criticise when we feel that it could have been struck differently. Nevertheless, we do not consider it responsible at this stage to remove the powers that we are using against terrorism from the statute book.

6.12 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I listened with some surprise to the speech of the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley). I have listened to debates such as this for many years, but I have never heard the hon. Gentleman or anyone else suggest that, if the number of people excluded ever fell to 35, they would change their mind about whether to oppose the legislation.

I listened with complete amazement to the speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I am sorry that the House is not full, because we have witnessed yet another instance of the undermining of the Labour's party's bid to be credible on law and order. It is almost mind-blowing that a spokesman for that party should argue at the Dispatch Box that it has changed its posture because the Government are setting up a review which is, in fact, irrelevant to Irish terrorism; that he should use as an excuse for the change of heart the fact that a review has been announced, when it was announced on 9 January, before a debate on emergency powers legislation whose Second Reading Labour opposed; and that he should be blissfully unaware that his party voted against Second Reading, insisting when I challenged that that was not so.

Miss Hoey: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I hope that the hon. Lady will not mind if I do not. I have only 10 minutes in which to speak.

Mr. Straw: If the review has nothing to do with the situation in Ireland, why was it announced on Second Reading of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: The hon. Gentleman has referred to Mr. Rowe's report on the operation of the Act, in which it was made absolutely clear that Lord Lloyd's brief was

"To consider the future need for specific counter-terrorism legislation . . . if the cessation of terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland leads to a lasting peace".

If the hon. Gentleman has not read that, however, I am not surprised, because he had not even read the report of the debate on the emergency powers legislation, and insisted that his party had not voted against it. That shows that the Labour party has no grip on the subject, that its members do not know what they are doing or saying and that, if there is a party fit to lead the country in the attack on terrorism, Labour is definitely not that party.

This is a fitting day on which to debate an Act that is intended to prevent the large-scale slaughter of innocent people. Most law-and-order legislation is directed at catching, convicting and sentencing the perpetrators of violent crime after their deeds have been done; if there is any element of prevention, it lies in establishing so fearsome a law that, if it is enforced efficiently, it may deter some would-be offenders. One of the strengths of this legislation is the fact that it meets the prevention of crime head on by proscribing terrorist organisations, and by excluding people suspected of involvement in terrorism from Great Britain and Northern Ireland as a whole.

Of course that is a form of rough justice, and it may be a denial of civil liberties; but there is ample justification for such action, and if the exclusion is directed in error in any particular case, no great harm is done.

Exclusion should not be seen as a punishment. It is a preventive measure, pure and simple. Moreover, exclusion orders can be reviewed by the Secretary of State if the independent adviser suggests it, or if fresh evidence appears that makes such a review necessary. They do not affect too many people, even if they affect them unjustly: the number of those excluded fell from 68 in 1994 to 35 in 1995—the lowest figure for 20 years. In fact, very few mistakes will have been made over those 35, because we have an exceptionally efficient Secret Intelligence Service.

This part of the legislation is not contrary even to the European convention on human rights. In the Gallagher case, it was made clear that the United Kingdom could derogate from article 5(3) in matters of exclusion and detention. John Rowe QC reviewed the operation of the Act even before the docklands bomb, and decided that it remained necessary to counter the threat of terrorism.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: No.

Above all, if justice must be rough and the strict obligation to be sure beyond all doubt must be waived, it is because the IRA makes it impossible to obtain evidence for a court by terrifying witnesses. The IRA makes it impossible to secure convictions by terrifying people who, but for the Diplock courts, would serve on a jury. Civil liberties must also be considered from the victim's point of view: the victim of a terrorist attack is entitled to his or her civil liberties, too. So if rough justice is being done, the IRA has no one to blame but itself. And if errors are made, surely it is better to err in an effort to save innocent lives than to err in order to guarantee civil liberties.

It is no surprise that the police support exclusion orders, because their effect is to disrupt terrorist activity. There is no more vital and effective way of preventing terrorism than removing suspected terrorists from areas where they may well be plotting to slaughter innocent people. It would, of course, surprise anyone who did not know the Labour party that the party bidding to form the next Government opposed this order, on civil liberties grounds, for 13 years, and that even today some of its members propose not to go along with the leadership. That shows just how split the Labour party is. By doing that, it was saying, was it not, that it was justified in putting first the civil liberties of persons against whom there was evidence, even if it could not be adduced in a court, showing that they were parties to terrorism.

When the hon. Member for Blackburn says that Labour's change of heart is to stop the wrong message being given to the IRA, he is making it clear that for years the party was giving the wrong message to the IRA and to the nation. In an article in *Tribune* on 8 March, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said:

"When Straw announced on television that Labour was no longer going to oppose the continuation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, he argued that, following the ending of the IRA ceasefire, it would send the wrong message to the IRA that somehow Labour was being soft on terrorism . . . It suggests that Roy Hattersley, Gerald Kaufman and the entire Labour leadership were, at the height of the IRA campaigns and atrocities, by opposing the PTA, sending out signals to the IRA that they were soft on terrorism."

How on earth can anyone call a decision to abstain, which I understand Labour intends to take, a clear message to the IRA?

It is obvious that Labour has woken up to the fact that it is suffering in the public eye by being soft on crime and its causes. It has decided to give a clear signal to the British people that it is "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime"—by abstaining.

Part of the legislation helps to protect innocent people from international terrorism—one of the blots from which the world is at present suffering. As new nation states emerge and states become unstable, international terrorism may grow. Terrorism is being used at the moment to undermine the peace in the middle east, with the most horrific acts of violence in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv and other parts of Israel. We have to play our part in helping to defeat international terrorism. We have pledged ourselves to do that by international treaties and agreements, and we are doing it by this legislation. We do it by helping to plug the hole in current legislation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I call Sir James Molyneaux.

Mr. Mullin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have been debating the Act for almost two hours. Forty minutes from now, the Front-Bench spokesmen will begin to sum up. The House has not yet heard anyone who is opposed to the Act. I hope that in the next 40 minutes someone will be permitted to put the opposition case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Sir James Molyneaux.

6.22 pm

Sir James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I shall not seek to follow that point of order, but it seems to me that a great many groans, moans and supplementaries showed a fair measure of dissent from the side of the House on which I sit.

In last year's debate on this legislation, my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) expressed the hope, which was shared by many of us—perhaps all of us—that there might be no need for the renewal that we are debating. He said:

"it is important that we do not lose the protection that the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act provide with regard to terrorist acts. It is not wise to leave the United Kingdom without some permanent protection."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 379-80.]

That has been the consistent view of my party for well over 20 years. It was because of our concern for the protection of the United Kingdom that the right hon. Enoch Powell persuaded a Committee examining the Act to extend its scope to deal with international terrorism. Not for the first time was he criticised, and not for the first or last time was Enoch Powell proved correct in his prediction. For what other reasons would the leaders of the world's nations gather in Egypt this very week? I imagine that the British delegation will have been surprised by the resolute approach of some other participating nations, most of which regard Britain as a soft touch for evil-doers. They may have derived that impression from making the mistake of reading *Hansard* in their native tongue.

In the House, there has been a marked reluctance to recognise the enormity of the challenge of international terrorism to democracy and civilisation. Wishful thinking clouds judgment to an extent that confounds many of our friends elsewhere. For example, several months ago at an Australian international airport, I complimented the security chief on the rigorous checking system employed at the airport. Innocently, I asked him whether it was intended to relax the measures in view of the IRA ceasefire. His reply was significant. He said, "No. The IRA ceasefire is only a small blip. We have to develop even more effective measures, mindful of the known fact that international terrorism will be a permanent affliction." Glancing at my boarding pass, he said, "Well, have a good trip, but remember that the jumbo jet is the most vulnerable element in modern society." That was a chilling thought to take home with me.

There are those who are ever-vigilant in their concern for the protection of human rights. They have been consistent, and one must admire their stand. They highlight, for example, exclusion orders, seven-day detentions and powers of arrest and search. But those are

[Sir James Molyneaux]

mere infringements that are reversible and have proved to be reversible—all of them. However, the obliteration of the human right to life is totally irreversible. What right of appeal was open to the Lockerbie victim, and what redress is available to an Israeli child who has been blown to bits? What can compensate the murdered newsagents at Canary wharf? It is of no avail to say that two wrongs do not make one right, but that is not the equation. The seven-day prisoner will be released, but the murdered citizen cannot have his life restored. The longer Governments dither over mere inconveniences, the more murders and mass murders there will be. That is the real, true moral challenge to all of us.

For the second half of this century, the NATO shield protected the free world from the horrors of both conventional and nuclear wars. We now have to ensure that this week's summit in Egypt leads to the establishment of a mechanism that is just as effective in its own way, as was NATO, in protecting democracy and civilisation from terrorist machines every bit as deadly as old-style warfare.

In my maiden speech in 1971, I explained that in Northern Ireland we were seeing for the first time in Europe a demonstration of urban guerilla warfare. The pattern evolving at that time and the product have been successfully exported to many parts of the world. It follows that the civilised world must construct a counter-terrorist organisation on the lines that were mentioned today by the Prime Minister during questions. We were all greatly encouraged to hear him say that the first step towards that goal would take place within a fortnight.

6.28 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): We have heard a reasoned and sensible speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) on the broad issues of terrorism. I should like to develop that theme a bit. This afternoon, we have discussed the terror inflicted on innocent children in a ghastly slaughter in Dunblane. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has returned from talks in Sharm el-Sheikh, where he has been discussing international terrorism, so it is especially apt that we should be discussing the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

As has rightly been pointed out, we live in an increasingly dangerous world where buses blow up in Tel Aviv and in the Aldwych. We see much violence on our screens, be it fictional or showing real incidents. That violence may have influenced Mr. Hamilton, the maniac in Dunblane. Other influences, voices and propaganda encourage people such as Edward O'Brien, who was blown up in the Aldwych. We should ask whether society should have the powers to defend itself against organised terrorism.

That is why I welcome the review under Lord Lloyd. It is right and important to review counter-terrorist measures. Legislation should cover the whole of the United Kingdom, not just part of it. The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act covers Northern Ireland. This part of the UK is covered by the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. Legislation covering the whole country would be more logical.

As the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley said, international terrorism is a threat in the United Kingdom. There have been recent attacks against Israeli targets. There is a fatwa against Salman Rushdie. Organisations here have links with Hamas. Further back, Georgi Markhov was murdered on Hungerford bridge by the Bulgarian secret service. International terrorism poses real threats to life and limb in this country. We should have the means to defend ourselves and the necessary tools in the locker to protect society.

I differ from the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who said:

> "I do not believe . . . that we need to keep emergency powers on the statute book when we do not have an emergency all the time."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 42.]

Internationally, the development of emergencies is growing. We should be able to keep some of those powers in abeyance, but the world is not becoming safer, so at the moment we need them.

Some of reasons why we must have the emergency provisions Act have been mentioned. The reasons include the fact that terrorists are not reasonable people. Sinn Fein spokesmen deny the truth when they speak on television. Last month, I heard Martin McGuinness interviewed on the BBC. For more than a minute, he was not interrupted by the interviewer. When does a Cabinet Minister escape being interrupted for more than a minute?

Sinn Fein spokesmen will twist the truth and brazenly say that black is white, and that the Government are to blame for the end of the ceasefire. That is patently untrue. As has been mentioned, Sinn Fein-IRA rely on crime for a large part of their income, as well as on gullible United States citizens. They rely on racketeering and on corruption.

I welcome last December's Proceeds of Crime (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, but Sinn Fein-IRA remain inextricably linked to crime, as do some Protestant paramilitaries. I was always opposed to the broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein and on the other paramilitaries. I should welcome some tough questioning. I wonder whether interviewers are intimidated by stony-faced terrorist sympathisers, some of whom are convicted terrorists with blood on their hands. I wonder whether Sinn Fein spokesmen have been schooled in resisting interrogation and being interviewed, because they stand there saying that black is white.

I make a plea to broadcasters, if any are listening. They should remember whom they are questioning, and be a little more forthright.

Intimidation is a real factor, which is why we need these provisions. There is intimidation against populations, voters, witnesses to crime on the mainland and witnesses in Northern Ireland, which Northern Ireland Members will know much more about than me. I remember bus drivers being held up with weapons and refusing to testify because they feared for their lives. There is intimidation here in relation to terrorism.

I should like to mention, in a slight digression perhaps, that there is intimidation against politicians in the House. Journalists have told me that some hon. Members are unwilling to speak openly on Northern Ireland. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, remembering the deaths of Airey Neave and of Ian Gow, to revisit the question of—

Mr. McNamara: What about Robert Bradford?

Mr. Robathan: I have yet to finish.

I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to revisit the question of candidates' addresses on nomination and ballot papers. That was considered in early 1992. I understand that that was backed by the Labour party. We give a gift to terrorists.

Northern Irish politicians live with that nightmare the whole time. Mr. Bradford has just been mentioned. Several hon. Members have been attacked. Lord Fitt from the other place was attacked in Andersonstown. More recently, the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and others were attacked.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The family of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea).

Mr. Robathan: I hear a sedentary intervention. Many hon. Members have been attacked and intimidated. I pay tribute to the bravery of hon. Members who still return here despite those attacks, but we should not assist terrorists, be they republican or loyalist, by giving them the gift of the home addresses of people who wish to speak out.

Here and in Northern Ireland, we need the extended powers that the EPA gives us. We are not dealing with cosy criminals from a "Dixon of Dock Green" wonderland. There is no honour among these thieves. The atrocities in Northern Ireland are too many to mention, but I recall the children murdered in Warrington. What brave boyos those murderers were. What courage they showed for the cause—another stain on the history of Ireland. A united Ireland is a respectable political aspiration, but those murders differed from those in Dunblane only in the number killed.

In August 1919, Siegfried Sassoon wrote a poem entitled "Aftermath". It stated:

"Have you forgotten yet?"

I say to Opposition Members who are considering voting against these measures—have they forgotten the Baltic exchange, Canary wharf, the mortars at Heathrow and other outrages? Has anyone been caught? I fear not, but at least we give the security forces all possible assistance.

The rule of law has been mentioned. The Government must act within the rule of law. Where they do not do so, or where their agents do not so, the judiciary should and does act. Generally the police have acted reasonably with the powers that have been given. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) may disagree, but the police are well motivated and reasonable, in marked contrast with the opponents they face.

Was Edward O'Brien 21? I think so. He was recruited by the lies and deceits of the IRA, destined to blow himself to bits and injure others, including a poor unfortunate fellow Irishman. Some hon. Members would say that that is no justification for giving the police the powers to stop and search someone whom they suspect, yet there are other sleepers and other IRA cells in this country. We must have the power to stop, search and detain if necessary. The Bill allows the exclusion of suspects. This country's population want the police to defend them and have the other powers that are given.

This is not a totalitarian measure. It is to protect the citizens of the United Kingdom. Hon. Members who oppose it show how gullible they are. I would accuse most of the Members who will do so this evening not of having sympathy for the IRA, but of extreme foolish and misguided ideology. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) talked of political prisoners. That says more about his gullibility, blinkered views and instincts than anything else. I hope that his comment is duly published in the newspapers.

The Labour party, I regret, is not backing this measure. I hope that it will convert at the last moment, support the Government, and show that it is not soft on terrorism.

6.38 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Today, we celebrate the release of the Birmingham Six. That terrible explosion was the cause of this legislation. Many of us were panicked into voting for it because we saw it as a means of protecting the Irish population in this country against what was happening to them as a result of that terrible episode. This is the fifth anniversary of release of the Birmingham Six, and the people who perpetrated that foul bombing are still at large. They have not been captured, for all the years that we have had the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

The last time we debated the Act, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) moved an amendment. It said:

"this House, reasserting its determination to defeat terrorism and believing that the defeat of terrorism in Northern Ireland can only be achieved with the wholehearted support of law-abiding citizens, declines to give a Second Reading to a Bill that undermines the rule of law on which the fight against terrorism must be based; and refuses to provide permanent powers either for a suspect to be detained for seven days without charge or for exclusion orders that effectively impose internal exile on British citizens, since such powers are wrong in principle and, by the offence they cause, aid rather than combat terrorists and terrorism".—[*Official Report*, 6 December 1988; Vol. 143, c. 215.]

The question we have to ask today is whether that position has altered in respect of the reasons why the Opposition voted for that reasoned amendment and against the Bill. My hon. Friends the Members for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) would argue that it has, and that the change has been the result of the Government's decision to appoint a commission, presided over by Lord Justice Lloyd and assisted by Mr. Justice Kerr, to determine what anti-terrorist legislation we might need in the event of a cessation of hostilities in Northern Ireland.

There is no cessation of hostilities in Northern Ireland. I regret that very much; I wish there were. I wish that the terms and conditions under which Lord Justice Lloyd is looking at these matters really existed, that the premise was there—but that is not the case. It is standing logic on its head to say that the Labour party reverses its position because of a Government decision based on a proposition which, sadly, has not become reality. Like everyone else, I hope that there will be an unconditional ceasefire today, but that has not yet happened. Therefore, the premise on which the Labour party has decided to abstain tonight does not exist.

Let us take the matter one stage further, and suppose that Lord Justice Lloyd produces his report in a vacuum and recommends that we should retain detention for seven days

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and exclusion orders. Do we then suddenly change our position and say, "Well, the referee, that impartial judge who has been appointed, does not accept our principles, so we must either accept what he says or reject what he says and vote accordingly"? Where is the consistency in that? There is none, so it is wrong of us to think or act in those terms.

During my happy days on the Front Bench, I spent some time looking at the question of a judicial commission. We did so in an attitude of trying to help a Government who seemed to be impaled upon the horns of seven-day detention and exclusion orders. We wanted to get away from those. However, the principles behind our suggestions were never accepted by the Government.

There was never any inter-party agreement to sit down and talk through the issues, which was our first proposition. Our second, for an independent commission, was never accepted while the fighting was continuing and the terror still existed. During that time, there was an elision of the principle of being against seven-day detention and internal exile, and a sudden belief in the "principle" of a judicial inquiry. Surely that is not in any way a principle.

If we get a decision we like, is there any guarantee that the Government will come through with it? From what we have heard from the Home Secretary today, it seems that the Government are implacably of the belief that they must retain exclusion orders and seven-day detention, without a judicial element. Did the Home Secretary say today that, if Lord Justice Lloyd came out with such and such a proposition, the Government would immediately embrace it? Has he given an undertaking that, when we get the result of the inquiry in the autumn, if it embraces certain suggestions we will have immediate legislation to put them into effect? Far from it. Considering the proposition for an independent judge is just putting off the problem until after the next general election. It is an easy way out.

We supported the proposition for a commission, but we never said that the exclusion orders and seven-day detention were anything other than wrong in principle, wrong in their effect. As a recruiting agent for the IRA, they have been without parallel.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): In about an hour, barring an unforeseen accident, the House will renew the Act. It will still contain the power for the Home Secretary to sign exclusion orders. My hon. Friend is aware of the case of John Matthews, to which I referred from the Front Bench when I was my hon. Friend's deputy. The Home Secretary can still sign an exclusion order for a young man who was set free from a magistrates court without a stain on his character. That power will be retained this evening, no matter what we do.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising a point that I had intended to make. The Home Secretary, in his speech, condemned left, right and centre people suspected of planting bombs, evil crimes, murder and so on. He put labels on people, yet not one of them is able to defend himself, to see the evidence or to go before a jury in this country or a Diplock court to defend himself. The Home Secretary engaged in some of the most terrible smearing imaginable. It puts those people in ghettos where they become walking targets, find it difficult to get jobs, and are unable to go out of their areas without being attacked.

I want to return to the Opposition's attitude. We are renewing these provisions in March. What happens if there is not a general election—the Government do not want one—until next spring, with Lord Justice Lloyd coming along with his report but the Government doing nothing? Why do we have to go through all this again, especially if Lord Justice Lloyd does not come down on our side? If he does come down on our side and we have the order, there will be the nonsense of voting on that occasion, but not on this one. It does not make sense.

I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that they cannot run before this particular Home Secretary, because he will get them every time. The logic is that, by abstaining, we are in effect voting for these provisions. There is no choice; there is no question of abstention—we are either for the provisions or we are against them. We welcome a judicial inquiry, but we should still stand firm against renewing the provisions.

6.48 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): There have been some remarks about being soft on terrorism. I have always regarded this debate as a litmus test on being soft on terrorism. Anyone who believes that any of us who come here as representatives of the north of Ireland are soft on terrorism should come and stay where we live, and he will find out about that.

I speak against, and will vote against, the motion for two reasons. My position is based on two basic principles of justice which do not, cannot and should not change with the political climate; which do not, cannot and should not change with the mood; and which do not, cannot and should not change with the feeling that is prevalent at any given time. It is not easy to speak against this Act today, after what happened in Scotland yesterday, but those principles must remain, and they are tied by two elements of the Act.

The first is the power of detention for seven days without any judicial assessment—contrary to the European convention on human rights—which is wrong, irrespective of the year or the circumstances. The second element is the power to exclude people in this jurisdiction, which is not only outside the norm of national and international law, but antipathetic to it.

The principles cannot be bartered away or be conditional on any prevalent mood. Nor can the debate be dispensed with by sleight of hand, on the fragile and probably fallacious argument that, as Micawber said, something might turn up. For Micawber insert Lloyd. Something will not turn up, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) correctly predicted.

When I heard the Labour party's decision to abstain, I felt obliged to look through copies of *Hansard* for the past 10 years that I have been a Member to find out what new elements I had not identified and what had changed since we last voted on the subject. I did not find any new element, except the proposed Lloyd review. Indeed, the principles that I hold were expressed by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) when he said:

"the only safeguard . . . against arbitrary arrest is a review by some authority outside the Government who arrested him or her."

That remains a principle to which I adhere, as I hope all hon. Members do.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook also expressed his opinion on the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights when he said:

"The fact that the Government have chosen to ignore or defy that judgment . . . is in itself cause for us to vote against the order."

That remains a cause for me to vote against the Act. He expanded on the point when he said:

"A second cause is a renewal of the powers that, in the words of a previous Attorney-General, amount to 'internal exile'—the exclusion orders."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. 822.]

I will not just cite the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook as an authority on the subject. I refer the House to what the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said in a similar debate:

"Exclusion orders represent an Executive power of such force that it belongs to an authoritarian regime and is unlike anything in the British tradition of parliamentary democracy . . . They are unacceptable to all true democrats".—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1989; Vol. 146, c. 31.]

They are unacceptable to me, and I hope that they are unacceptable to other hon. Members too.

The power of seven-day detention has been abused. The former Home Secretary, Sir Leon Brittan, allowed it to be abused when he defined two reasons why it could be used. He said that it could be used

"first, as a deterrent to persons other than the people who have been detained and, secondly",

because it has

"enabled information to be obtained that was of direct value in the battle against terrorism, even though it did not lead to action against the people concerned."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1983; Vol. 47, c. 55-6.]

There is a dilution of the principles of law in a statement by a former Home Secretary.

Such dilution has affected many people—mostly Irish people in Britain. We are all appalled by the bomb attack in which a young man was killed. Does anybody know the name of the young man who was injured in that incident? His name was Paul Woodhead, who ended up in hospital under armed guard and was detained under the PTA. He was the only person of all those who were injured to be put in that position—why? Because he is Irish. Although I understand the position in which people find themselves after an explosion, that is too much of a coincidence. I simply use that one example, but I could use many more.

The proposed review—regardless of whether Lord Lloyd turns out to be Micawber—is not the first that has been carried out by eminent jurists. Reviews have been carried out by Lord Jellicoe, Lord Shackleton, Lord Gardiner, Sir Cyril Phillips, Lord Colville, Sir George Baker and John Rowe. They all conducted either detailed or broad reviews of the operation of the Acts, and they all have one thing in common: when they recommended changes to the fundamental principles, the Government ignored them. The Government ignored their suggestions about exclusion orders and a judicial element in the seven-day detention power.

What should we expect from the latest review? Where is the confidence that, somehow or other, the Government will be convinced that the situation has changed so much that they should accept the review? I cannot make that act of faith in Lord Lloyd, any more than I could in John Rowe or any of the noble Lords who reviewed the legislation.

When the Home Secretary referred to the input of a judicial element in the seven-day detention power in last year's debate, he said that the Government had carried out a review, and informed us:

"We have considered whether there might be a different way to achieve that objective, and we have come to the conclusion that there is not."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 305.]

Lord Lloyd is going to review a proposed judicial element, yet the Government's view is that things will not change, irrespective of what he presents to the House.

I leave the last word on the subject to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), whose speech I listened to with great interest, and some alarm. I wrote down at the time the words that he used in a television interview he gave on "Newsnight", so I know that I am not misquoting him. He said of the PTA:

"it is a bad Act, and it needs to go."

I believe that it is a bad Act. I believe that it needs to go. But the only way in which I can try to ensure that is by voting against it tonight, as I hope every hon. Member who feels that way will do, given that it abuses the principles of law.

6.57 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I consider the term prevention of terrorism Act a misnomer; it has not prevented terrorism. Twenty-two years ago, it was rushed through both Houses of Parliament in the aftermath of the Birmingham bombings. It has certainly not helped to catch the real culprits and, since then, many innocent people have been arrested and detained under it. We should be very wary about simple knee-jerk reactions to acts of terrorism.

We all condemn the atrocities, including the recent London bombings, and want to bring the perpetrators to justice. Lord Colville, who conducted a review of the PTA, said:

"if we stoop to the level of the terrorists and abandon altogether our fundamental liberties, we have lost the battle against terrorism."

I was a Member of Parliament when the original legislation was enacted. Even Lord Jenkins, the Home Secretary at the time, admitted that it was a draconian measure. Exclusion orders are a form of internal exile by ministerial decree. Ministers can order detention for up to seven days with no judicial hearing. It is no wonder that such extreme powers were found to be in breach of the European convention on human rights and that the British Government had to seek a derogation from the convention.

Since the introduction of the prevention of terrorism Act, 448 people have been served with exclusion orders—33 of which are still in force. Since 1974, more than 27,000 people have been detained under the PTA and about 85 per cent. of them were not charged with any offence. It is a very blunt instrument and it could prove counter-productive in the campaign against terrorism. Good police-community relations are absolutely essential in that campaign, and the prevention of terrorism Act has succeeded in alienating many innocent people, their families and their communities. It has caused hostility between communities and the police, particularly among

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young people, who are often arrested and detained—their only crime being their Irish accent, Irish name or Irish family connections.

Since last year's debate, the Government have established another review, to be undertaken by Lord Lloyd of Berwick. I have no great confidence that he will tackle the basic problem. His terms of reference are as follows:

"To consider the future need for specific counter-terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom, if the cessation of violence connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland leads to a lasting peace".

As we all now know, that is a big "if". It could be argued that those terms of reference have been tragically overtaken by events in view of the IRA's deplorable decision to end the ceasefire. I think that the Home Secretary said in his opening remarks that the Lloyd review has precious little to do with terrorism related to the Irish situation. Given that fact, I do not expect Lloyd to recommend scrapping the exclusion orders and introducing a judicial element into detention orders. At best, we simply do not know what Lloyd will recommend. It would be naive to buy a pig in a poke by voting for continuing the Act or abstaining in the hope that Lloyd will address the legitimate criticisms that have been made.

I have voted against this draconian legislation for many years and nothing that I have heard tonight has persuaded me to do otherwise. If the Government are serious about eliminating terrorism, they should repeal all such oppressive legislation, establish better police-community relations, and accelerate the peace process so that the terrorists and potential terrorists can see clearly that democratic and exclusively peaceful means are the only way to make progress and to build a better society based on peace, justice and equality.

7.2 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I am grateful to be called to speak in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker—particularly in light of my recent point of order. It is a pleasure to be associated with the principled stand taken by the hon. Members for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) and for South Down (Mr. McGrady). No one could accuse them of being soft on terrorism: they must live with the realities of it every day.

Although I am well aware of his general view of the world, I was a little disappointed by the contribution of the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who is a distinguished lawyer and a part-time judge. I was disappointed to hear him talk quite enthusiastically about the need for rough justice. That gives us a glimpse of the judicial thinking that perhaps got us into the difficulties that we were in a few years ago.

I am as much in favour of catching terrorists as anyone—indeed, I have had rather better luck than the British authorities in tracking down the odd terrorist, without having the prevention of terrorism Act or any other such powers at my disposal. I should state at the outset that my interest is in justice—particularly British justice. I do not believe that the Act has led to the arrest and conviction of terrorists who would not otherwise have been arrested and convicted. However, I believe that it has led to the harassment of many decent people who are not terrorists.

I accept, as some have argued, that the Act is no longer used—or misused—as much as it was in the past and I welcome that fact. I think that that is probably because of the pressure that the Opposition have maintained for the past 13 or 14 years in voting against the measure.

I accept that there might be a case for some of the provisions in the Act, which my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) mentioned. Like most hon. Members who have spoken, I find exclusion orders distasteful, but they are not as effective as Ministers seem to think. One of the first people to be excluded under an exclusion order was one of the organisers of the Birmingham pub bombings. He should not have been excluded, but arrested and put on trial. On another occasion, I met someone who had been excluded who returned to the country during his period of exclusion and even visited friends in prison.

For all the talk, exclusion orders are not as effective as the Home Secretary appears to think. However, that is not the fundamental reason why I shall vote against the measure this evening. My principal objection arises from section 14(5) of the Act, which gives the Secretary of State power to extend, to up to seven days, the holding of prisoners incommunicado and without the safeguards of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. That is the bottom line as far as I am concerned: I shall not vote for any measure that allows prisoners to be held incommunicado for up to seven days. I know from experience—as we all should by now—that it is possible to get anyone to confess to anything if he or she is at one's disposal for seven days and nights. Perhaps the Home Secretary or Lord Lloyd of Berwick might consider extending the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to cover those who are arrested in connection with terrorism.

My attitude will be changed not by a review, but by a change in the Act. Until the Act, or section 14(5), is changed, I propose to continue to vote against it.

7.7 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): I begin by offering the apologies—as did my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—of my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) and for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) who, with many hon. Members from Northern Ireland and others, are in the United States at this particularly significant time.

As the House knows, the measures that we are considering today have their origins in the response to the slaughter that resulted from the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974. I have a very clear recollection of those outrages, as I am sure do all hon. Members. I remember them particularly for the reaction of one Irish person who had been resident in London for more than 40 years, 15 of which were spent serving in the Royal Air Force, including the whole of the second world war. He was working for the Post Office, as he had done for 20 years. He felt unable to go to work, or even to leave the house, on the day after the bombings, not because he feared abuse or worse, but because he felt deeply ashamed at being Irish and at what had been done allegedly in his name. He was a mature, well-established British citizen who had his home and his family in London. Tragically, his experience was not unique. It has been shared by far too many other members of the Irish community both then and since. I know that that is true because that man was my father.

In the past 25 years or so, the gunmen and the bombers of the IRA, in their culpable distortion of the tradition of Irish republicanism, far from advancing peace and freedom in Ireland, have brought untold suffering, misery, distress and disgrace upon Irish people wherever they might be. It would be hard to find a better exposition of that than the extraordinary and resonant speech of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) on the Third Reading of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill a few weeks ago. I recommend study of it to every hon. Member.

The return of the so-called bombing campaign by the IRA has had a particular significance in Lewisham, part of which I represent. The Aldwych bus bomber was staying in a flat in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice). The 171 bus left Catford bus garage on that fateful Sunday evening and the driver who, thankfully, is making a good recovery, lives in Brockley in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock). One of the tragic victims of the South Quay atrocity lived in Downham, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East. Lewisham has a large and well-established Irish community and those events have done nothing to its benefit—as is true of the rest of the country.

I was particularly struck by what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said about the experience of Mr. Paul Woodhead, who happened to be an innocent Irishman in the wrong place. Although it should be placed on record that his family in Dublin quite understood why security forces here and in the Republic had to take certain precautions, one can imagine their horror when the Gardai turned up on their doorstep to tell them that he had been seriously injured—I am pleased to hear that he is recovering—and that he was suspected of having been deeply involved in an IRA atrocity in London.

As has been said, tonight's debate is about means and not ends. There can be no dispute that all hon. Members are resolutely determined to stop the inhuman brutality of terrorism wherever it may occur and whoever perpetrates it. The discussion centres on the effectiveness of the proposed measures and the circumstances to which they apply.

The Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn, among others, have made it plain that the circumstances are different now from what they were a year ago. The Home Secretary said that the circumstances had not been the same in any of the years in which he has dealt with the matter. The Government's agreement to establish a review, under Lord Lloyd of Berwick, of temporary and emergency powers to counter the terrorist threat—for which we have been pressing for a number of years—is most positive. Some hon. Members may feel that it is not change enough, but without doubt the most negative change since last year has been the ending of the IRA ceasefire and the assertion by Sinn Fein that the peace process is finished.

Our forthright response is twofold. First, we should state categorically that the search for a lasting peace with security in Britain and Ireland will never be over—under any Government, here or in Dublin—until it has achieved its end. The only choice is about whether any party or group wishes to take the necessary steps to join in that endeavour. It will never be easy, but that is inevitable.

Secondly, no democratic Government or society can allow those who use violence, subversion and intimidation to have a veto over progress towards the just settlement that is craved by the overwhelming majority of decent people throughout these islands.

One of the most insidious threats to democracy from those who sponsor and practise terror is that they provoke a disproportionate response from those they attack, which they can then use as a spurious retrospective justification for their actions. There can never be any doubt that terrorism will be resisted by all necessary means, but we must always ensure that we do not fall into that devious trap.

In a recent written answer, the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), who is not in his place, stated:

> "Whatever the law . . . should be, it is clearly essential that it should allow for the efficient use of public resources; pay due regard to public safety yet be no more restrictive than absolutely necessary, and be capable of being effectively applied and not open to abuse."—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. *402*.]

I am certain that all hon. Members will agree. Certainly Opposition Members do—it is a model of its kind. The only argument that arose when I quoted that sentence to the Minister when the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill was discussed in Committee, concerned how the current proposals compared with that standard.

We are dealing with an entirely reasonable and legitimate subject on which hon. Members have strong views. The measures have far-reaching consequences. There should be no doubt that we are prepared to take whatever action is appropriate to defend democracy, its citizens and its freedoms against any group that threatens it, but in our unflinching determination to do so, we must be certain that we do not make an already difficult task harder by neglecting or overlooking the very values for which our society stands.

Some hon. Members have asked what store we set by Lord Lloyd. Others, most notably the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), clearly do not understand the purpose of the Lloyd review. It is plainly absurd for him to assert that it has nothing to do with Northern Ireland. Not only was it announced in the House on 9 January by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but Lord Lloyd will be assisted in his deliberations by Mr. Justice Kerr, who has been appointed specifically because he is a judge in the High Court in Northern Ireland. It is absurd for the hon. and learned Gentleman to say that there is no impact on Northern Ireland.

It is disingenuous in the extreme for the Home Secretary to minimise what he feels will emerge from the Lloyd review. I would say that it is unworthy of the Home Secretary to be so inflammatory, but it may be unworthy of the office of Home Secretary rather than the Home Secretary himself. We do not prejudge the outcome of the Lloyd review.

The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) said that he would prefer there to be a single, comprehensive package of anti-terrorist legislation. That is precisely what we have been pursuing and urging on the Government for many years. We hope that Lord Lloyd will be able to make such a recommendation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn explained that we have strong reservations about the current legislation but, as he also made plain, we have no

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objection to the bulk of its provisions and are in favour of their continuing. Indeed, there might be a case for strengthening some of them. It seems odd that the Home Secretary should diminish what is likely to emerge from the Lloyd review—

Sir Ivan Lawrence: He does not.

Mr. Dowd: The hon. and learned Member for Burton says that he does not, but I am sure that the Home Secretary is perfectly capable of making his own defence. I understand that the hon. and learned Member for Burton has represented various dubious clients in the past, including the Kray brothers, but he should not let his enthusiasm run away with him when defending the Home Secretary.

The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill was brought in for a two-year period—the preceding measure ran for five years—precisely so that it could be open to the amendment and revision that we hope the review will recommend. We believe that the review is long overdue, and we hope that Lord Lloyd will reach the same conclusion as Lord Colville and that the legislation can be improved so that it stops being in part—and only in part—counter-productive and measures up to the standard of security that the British people have every right to expect.

7.18 pm

Mr. Howard: With the leave of the House, I should like to pick up the main themes that have emerged from the debate and respond to some of the points that have been raised.

As in previous years, much has been made of the exclusion power. We have heard objections to it on grounds of civil liberties or its being an unacceptable form of internal exile. As I have already made clear, it is a power that has been used sparingly and carefully over the past year and there are only 33 exclusion orders currently in force—less than half the number at the beginning of 1995.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Home Secretary agree that it is dangerous for any Minister to have the use of exclusion powers, and that it is doubly dangerous to have exclusion powers that cannot be contested in a court of law and, therefore, are not open to public examination? That is condemned around the world and it should be condemned here as well.

Mr. Howard: It has not been condemned by people who have examined the issue, including Mr. Rowe, because they know that it would be naive and irresponsible for a Government to abandon the power of exclusion while the IRA maintains its weapons, explosives and the will to use them.

I will put it plainly to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and others who think like him. If we had obtained intelligence of who was planning to carry out the South Quay bombing, or of Edward O'Brien's purpose in coming to London to lie low with a stock of Semtex, I would have had no qualms in excluding them and using the powers that the prevention of terrorism Act provides. I do not believe that anyone has the "civil liberty" to travel around the United Kingdom to commit whatever acts of terrorism he pleases. I am far more concerned with the civil liberty to run a newsagents in docklands without the roof being blown in on top of one, or to catch a No. 171 bus without it blowing up in the Strand. Those are the civil liberties about which I care passionately.

Mr. Corbyn *rose—*

Mr. McNamara *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I shall not give way again. I was generous in giving way during my opening remarks, and now I want to finish in the time allotted to me.

As for extensions of detention under section 14 of the Act, to which the hon. Member for Sunderland, South referred, I give my personal authority for any detention beyond 48 hours. In doing so, I look at the case put by the police—including, for example, the need not simply for questioning, but for further inquiries or searches to be made or, with foreign suspects, for suspicious material to be translated. I take into account any intelligence that might justify the inquiries. Where an extension of detention is necessary for investigative purposes, I authorise it, for the period necessary.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South was wrong when he suggested that it is possible under section 14 for a person to be detained for seven days, incommunicado and without seeing a solicitor. The maximum time that the right to consult a solicitor can be delayed, and then only for the specific purposes set out in section 14, is 48 hours. The maximum time for which contact with a solicitor can be delayed in non-PTA cases is 36 hours. The hon. Gentleman attached great significance to those powers this evening and on the "Today" programme this morning, but he is mistaken in his interpretation of section 14. The difference between that section and the ordinary application of the law outwith the prevention of terrorism Act is limited.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Home Secretary saying that no one has ever been held, without access to a solicitor, for more than 48 hours under the Act?

Mr. Howard: I have no knowledge of anybody being held for more than 48 hours, for which section 14 provides—the power that we are debating this evening, and which the hon. Gentleman misinterpreted or misunderstood.

It was suggested that the power of detention should include a judicial element, but the decision to detain cannot sensibly be taken by anyone who does not have access to the full intelligence picture that enables an informed judgment to be made. The introduction of a judicial element has been rejected in a series of reviews of the Act—by Lord Shackleton in 1978, by Lord Jellicoe in 1983 and by Viscount Colville in 1987. Mr. Rowe deals with the matter in chapters 6 and 8 of his report, in which he succinctly, but clearly, sets out the arguments against judicial intervention. I shall not repeat the arguments because they are set out for all to see in the report.

Perhaps the most difficult issue to address is the funding of terrorist operations in other countries. Whatever legislation is in place, it is extremely difficult to get the

evidence necessary to secure a conviction. Money can be laundered through various routes, and some may be used for humanitarian purposes as a cover. As soon as one, supposedly innocent, fund-raising activity is exposed, the collecting tins come out under another guise. To tackle that, we need close and careful international co-operation. In many cases, it may be best to tackle the fund raiser rather than the fund that he establishes—excluding or deporting where there is information that justifies the use of those powers on the basis that the person's activities are effectively funding terrorism elsewhere. I shall continue to give close attention to that. If there are ways of tightening up our practices that will make a real difference, I shall be delighted to put them into effect.

Much has been made of Lord Lloyd's review. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) asked whether the review could consider introducing new powers. I unhesitatingly give my hon. Friend my assurance that it will. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) suggested that I was seeking to minimise the significance of the Lloyd review, but nothing could be further from the truth. I said that the Lloyd report is predicated on the ending of Northern Irish terrorism. It is intended to examine the permanent powers that we shall need to combat terrorism if and when there is a ceasefire in Northern Ireland—so it is not relevant to the heart of the issues we have debated today. I see many nodding heads among the right hon. and hon. Gentlemen seated behind the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who wholly failed to grasp the central aspect of the report's significance in relation to this debate.

I walked through South Quay with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I saw the devastation caused in London just a few weeks ago. Ask people in South Quay if they support the prevention of terrorism Act. Ask the families of people who were murdered there. Ask the people who were injured. Ask those whose homes were shattered or whose businesses were devastated. We all know the answer that they would give. They would queue up to vote with the Government in the Lobby tonight—and that is where all right hon. and hon. Members should be if they want effective action to combat terrorism—not just to talk about it.

If we are to fight terrorism effectively, and to give our people the protection that they need, we need the powers in the prevention of terrorism Act. That is why I invite the House to approve the order and the regulations.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 222, Noes 26.

Division No. 77] **[7.27 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dover, Den
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain

Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Burns and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Canavan, Dennis
Cohen, Harry
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Etherington, Bill
Fyfe, Maria
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Hendron, Dr Joe
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Livingstone, Ken
Loyden, Eddie
McGrady, Eddie
McNamara, Kevin
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mullin, Chris
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Stott, Roger

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Max Madden and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 22nd February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Exclusion Orders) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 22nd February, be approved.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Theatr Clwyd

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

7.40 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I welcome the opportunity to raise the important issue of Theatr Clwyd. This debate relates to the closure of an important social and cultural asset of north Wales and north-west England. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales will respond positively to my points, as the Welsh Office has a central and crucial role to play in the future of the theatre—just as it has had a central part to play in the problems associated with the possible closure of the theatre.

In 1994, the Welsh Office was instrumental in passing the Local Government (Wales) Bill, which has had a bearing on the possible closure of the theatre because of the abolition of Clwyd county council. I hope that this debate will present the Welsh Office with a good opportunity to respond positively to the points that I have been putting to Ministers.

I should like to record my thanks to my hon. Friends the Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) for their staunch support for Theatr Clwyd over the past few months. I am also pleased to see the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) in his place; he too has taken an interest in the theatre's future.

Theatr Clwyd is based in Mold in my constituency. It is owned by Clwyd county council and operated as a directly provided service through a board of governors comprising 16 elected councillors and 11 co-operative non-voting members. Its staff are all local government employees. Theatr Clwyd comprises two excellent theatres: a main theatre, seating between 530 and 590, and a large flexible studio, seating between 180 and 300. It also contains a cinema with 129 seats, a television facility including a dual-use television and drama studio, many galleries, a multi-function performance and function room with up to 250 seats, and facilities to support a producing theatre company and educational services for the community.

The theatre also houses the leading drama company in Wales, which currently presents a minimum of six and a maximum of 12 productions a year at home, giving about 200 to 320 performances a year. The company spends up to 15 weeks a year on tour throughout the rest of the United Kingdom, and often gives performances in London's west end.

The theatre plays host to a range of quality visiting drama, dance and music, and presents a large programme of film and exhibitions. All this is available to the people in Flintshire, the rest of Clwyd and north-west England. The wide-ranging educational provision includes a professional theatre-in-education company, a youth theatre, courses, classes, a professional dance service, and training and work experience opportunities for young people.

There are currently about 1,300 performances a year in the theatre and more than 150 performances on tour in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom. Nearly 200 performances are sponsored by the theatre in schools in the county of Clwyd, and there are nearly 1,000 workshops and courses a year throughout the county. The facilities, the staff, the location and the financial resources have attracted artists of the finest calibre from all over the United

Kingdom to Mold, sure in the knowledge that standards achievable at the theatre are among the highest in the UK. I could name many actors and actresses who have performed there: Vanessa Redgrave, Joan Plowright, Philip Madoc, Timothy West, Julie Christie and Sir Anthony Hopkins have all performed there recently—a formidable list.

This theatre in my constituency is unique. There is no other arts complex of its kind in Wales or north-west England; there is no other theatre company in Wales that can produce work of such quality and with such a high profile.

About 400,000 people a year see the work of the theatre or visit its facilities. There are well over 160,000 paid attendances at the theatre, and well over 120,000 other users come to it. Well over 60,000 people take part in workshops, courses and classes in Clwyd, and well over 10,000 people participate in the theatre-in-education in Clwyd's schools. Well over 20,000 people, excluding London west end audiences, see the theatre on tour each year.

These figures are much higher than those of other theatres in major conurbations, such as the West Yorkshire playhouse, the Nottingham playhouse, or even the Birmingham repertory theatre and the Leicester Haymarket theatre. Theatr Clwyd has consistently attracted large audiences and now has a well-established profile, offering a dependable base from which to attract further audiences and bring the community in to see the work of the theatre. It is a thriving business, with an annual turnover of more than £4 million.

Until the advent of local government reorganisation—my reason for calling this debate—Clwyd county has provided the theatre with financial support for its core operation amounting to about £1.5 million a year. The Arts Council of Wales has given about £500,000 towards the production costs of the theatre company. Income earned from people who come to the theatre currently totals more than £1.5 million a year. The theatre has developed tight financial controls to ensure that there is no budget deficit. A considerable amount of money is spent by local people at the theatre, and a considerable amount of local ratepayers' money contributes to the running costs, besides the grant that the Arts Council of Wales pays.

In my constituency, the theatre employs 65 permanent staff and more than 600 other people on a temporary basis, many of them from north-west England and north-east Wales. Contracts from the theatre for catering and cleaning services create at least another 39 jobs locally, and the theatre draws significantly on supplies of many local products from north Wales and north-west England. Payments to businesses in north Wales alone amounted to almost £500,000 in 1994-95, and payments to businesses in England were well over £1.3 million.

As is recognised in many of the letters that I have received from constituents, Theatr Clwyd helps to draw in people to north-east Wales. They then spend their money at local restaurants and in hotels and other holiday accommodation. They also support coach operators throughout the north-west and north Wales, and they spend their money in Mold. I am sure that the hon. Member for City of Chester finds that the Gateway theatre in Chester has the same beneficial effect. Certainly, Theatr Clwyd is a major attraction to inward investment and tourism.

The theatre is also recognised by many businesses in north Wales as one of the reasons why they established themselves there in the first place. It constitutes an added attraction to the area, along with many other of our facilities in north Wales.

All that has been achieved by the local authority over the 20 years of the theatre's existence. I pay tribute to the people who founded the theatre, to Clwyd county council and to the board of governors who have sustained the theatre for all these years. I also pay tribute to Patrick Gilcrest and his staff, who have worked hard to develop the theatre and to ensure that it attracts audiences.

We are left with a problem which I hope this evening we can, by agreement, resolve. The problem relates to the abolition, under local government reorganisation, of Clwyd county council, which has sustained the theatre to the tune of £1.5 million over these years. With effect from 1 April this year, Clwyd county council will no longer exist. Over the past few months, that fact has cast grave doubts on the future viability of the theatre. The money that the council has been paying will have to be found from elsewhere. I hope that that problem can finally be resolved by means of this debate and by discussion with local authorities over the next few weeks.

Local government reorganisation was the creation of the Welsh Office. That, in part, is why I asked for an Adjournment debate. I voted against Second Reading of the Bill that introduced reorganisation, but that is by the bye. Reorganisation has taken place. The Welsh Office has created unitary authorities, and I wish those authorities well. Elections took place last year and the electors in the authority that covers my constituency elected a Labour council. I wish that council well for the future.

The Welsh Office, because of the focus of local government reorganisation, has moral and political responsibilities to help the new authorities through the difficult times that face Theatr Clwyd. Clwyd county council has split into the four new authorities of Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wrexham, and Aberconwy and Colwyn. The theatre is in Mold, in Flintshire, in my constituency.

The Minister is aware of the background to these matters but it is important to place it on record. The fact that Theatr Clwyd was in some difficulty was raised during consideration of the reorganisation Bill about two years ago. At that time, the previous Secretaries of State for Wales, the right hon. Members for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) and for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), gave assurances that local government reorganisation would not damage the theatre's prospects and that the theatre would not be adversely affected. Commitments were given to ensure the continuation of the theatre. They were given verbally to the leader of the council. Commitments were also given in Committee to the effect that the issue would be considered.

It became clear late last year that it was necessary to clarify matters. It had always seemed that 1 April 1996 was a long way off, but at the end of 1995 it became apparent that that date was not so far away and that matters should be resolved. In October 1995, the Arts Council of Wales recommitted its £500,000, as it had done for several years. In January, the new Flintshire authority committed £600,000 of ratepayers' money to establish dialogue to try to secure the £1.5 million deficit that Clwyd county council had previously undertaken.

[Mr. David Hanson]

I am grateful to the Minister with responsibilities for local government in Wales for meeting a delegation of Flintshire councillors and my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside and me late last year. During the meeting, we raised the issue of Theatr Clwyd and put on record the need for the Welsh Office to come forward with some proposals to secure future viability and to support the local authority.

I must praise Flintshire for taking the initiative. The authority requested the meeting and took responsibility for trying to find a funding solution. It has committed £600,000 of ratepayers' money, which is 40 per cent. of Clwyd county council's former grant. Flintshire has only 35 per cent. of the former Clwyd county council's population. The Labour leader, Councillor Tom Middlehurst, has shown commitment, with the chief executive, Philip McCreavy, but has needed the support of the Welsh Office and other authorities to help keep the theatre viable.

On the announcements of £600,000 from Flintshire and £500,000 from the Arts Council of Wales being made available, considerable community interest was shown. The local communities rallied around, and they have shown their support for the theatre. I have had numerous letters from constituents who have requested support to maintain it. Many people from England, as well as from my constituency and throughout Wales, have written to me. An early-day motion was tabled and signed by many hon. Members from England and Wales.

Local newspapers—the *Chester Chronicle* and the *Daily Post*—ran strong campaigns to save the theatre and to put pressure on those who had influence. Many engaged in the theatre and in the theatrical profession generally have professed their support. I understand that the Welsh Office has received more than 1,000 letters from individuals expressing support for the retention of the theatre and for the Welsh Office to take positive action.

On 8 February, during the debate on local government finance, the Secretary of State responded to the meetings that have taken place and to the pressure that has been exerted by many people by announcing a £1.3 million one-off grant, subject to a long-term future for the theatre, to write off outstanding capital debts. He said:

"I share its"—

the Flintshire authority's—

"opinion that Theatr Clwyd should continue to provide the high-quality productions for which it is famous."—[*Official Report*, 8 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 489.]

The one-off grant is welcome. It will pay for the capital cost of the project.

Shortly after that, the Arts Council of Wales announced a further £200,000 direct funding grant to support the £500,000 that it had given already. It became clear, however, that there was still a significant financial shortfall, taking into account what the theatre had enjoyed previously while under the ownership and control of Clwyd county council. The £1.3 million grant from the Welsh Office and the £200,000 additional funding from the Arts Council of Wales were consistent with and subject to local authorities in former Clwyd contributing significant sources of resource.

There were expectations of Denbighshire, Wrexham, and Aberconwy and Colwyn councils to provide significant sources of funding to help the theatre to continue at the current level of funding. The Minister will be aware that £50,000 has been promised by Denbighshire, £56,000 by Wrexham and £23,000 by Aberconwy and Colwyn. These moneys, while genuinely welcome, were not necessarily what was expected, and not what was formerly paid by the ratepayers of former Clwyd. The reasons that lie behind that are varied and complicated and I do not wish to rehearse them tonight. Until this week, however, there was a projected deficit of about £319,000, when set against the undertaking of former Clwyd, in maintaining the theatre for the forthcoming financial year.

The Minister will be aware that the theatre had projected savings of about £100,000 and increases in income. I am sure that those savings and increases in income would have been helpful. When I requested this debate this week, there was still a shortfall of £319,000 and grave concern that the theatre would close from 30 June unless funding was made available from another source. The funding package that the Secretary of State brought forward had an initial deadline of 8 March for acceptance. I welcome the extension of that deadline to enable further consideration to be given by local authorities to tackling a major deficit.

Events move with speed, however, and only yesterday a meeting was convened by Clwyd county council of the four unitary authorities, at which representatives of the Arts Council of Wales were present. It was decided at that meeting to produce a package for the theatre, which I hope will get it through the next financial year.

The funding package may still mean job losses, significant cuts and grave difficulties. I hope that the Minister will take up those issues when he replies. The county council had drawn on resources from its dying days. In effect, a deathbed grant has been made to the new authorities to try to get the theatre through the next financial year, with a substantial package of cuts. There is still no long-term future, however, for the theatre complex and for the good services that the theatre provides.

I am pleased that the county council has been able to assist. I am pleased also, of course, that it has been able to carry some finance through to next year. However, the package is still subject to the agreement of the Secretary of State's office. I look for some positive news on that front from the Minister.

As I have said, events have moved on since I applied for this debate, but there are still matters that need to be tackled. There are a number of key points with which I hope the Minister will deal positively this evening. There is still the need to take matters forward for the future. We have an excellent theatre that provides extremely good services to 400,000 people. It is popular and well known, and has a value in the community. I believe that the Welsh Office has certain moral and political responsibilities and that there are things that only the Welsh Office can do to help secure the long-term funding of the theatre.

First, I ask the Minister to ensure that the £1.3 million grant that was placed on record by the Secretary of State on 8 February will remain on the table during current discussions, subject to the package that local authorities are trying to agree for the next financial year. That

package should be available for the short-term future of the theatre as well as for the long term. I hope that the Minister will be able to ensure that the arts council's additional £200,000 is available for use next year to see the theatre through the next 12 months. That would be a key statement this evening that would give the local authorities confidence to commit the package and so to get the theatre through the next 12 months.

Secondly, I hope that the Welsh Office will adopt a positive role during the next 12 months to try to secure the theatre's long-term future. I hope also that the Minister, through his officials, will be able to convene a meeting in the next few months with all interested parties who have a stake in the theatre to discuss its future and that of the complex after 31 March 1997. The situation should be all right next year, but we need to discuss and consult on what will happen in future years. I hope that the Minister will use his good offices to facilitate that meeting, because the Welsh Office has a responsibility and a key role in the matter which it should take on.

Thirdly, I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister will generally examine the issue of local government funding of the theatre. I have certainly had representations from Flintshire—I am sure that Wrexham, Denbighshire, and Aberconwy and Colwyn councils would support those representations—to examine the capping levels for local authorities this year and in the future so that the facility's regional potential can be taken into account. In the review of the standard spending assessment and the formulae, I hope that the Minister will take the regional nature of Theatr Clwyd into account. I do not expect an answer from him this evening, but I hope that he will consider the matter so that future SSAs and capping levels reflect local authorities' responsibilities in committing themselves to the theatre.

Fourthly, I should like to impress on the Minister the strong feeling in my community and in the local authorities that, although Theatr Clwyd is in Wales and receives substantial support from Welsh ratepayers, the Welsh Office and the Arts Council of Wales, some 50 per cent. of its audience comes from England. My constituency is not 20 minutes from that of the hon. Member for City of Chester. Many people travel; I have had letters from constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) and from Bolton, Liverpool, Shropshire and Cheshire about individuals who go to Theatr Clwyd to see a performance. It is a regional theatre in Wales provided by local ratepayers, but I hope that it will receive support from the Welsh Office in the future and continue to receive support from the Arts Council of Wales.

Flintshire has asked—I ask the Minister to consider this request—whether there is scope for the Welsh Office and for Flintshire to support contact and discussion with the Department of National Heritage and the Arts Council of England to secure at least discussion on the possibility of some funding from England, which would follow individuals from England who attend the theatre.

Flintshire has written to the chief executives of Cheshire county council, Chester city council, Shropshire county council, Wirral metropolitan borough council, and Ellesmere Port and Neston borough council, among others, seeking financial contributions from the rates of those authorities to help Theatr Clwyd's revenue support. To date, all replies have been negative. Flintshire simply feels, as I am sure the other authorities do, that the facility is welcome in Wales and is a boon to Wales, but that it also has an impact on England.

I should welcome the Minister's comments on whether he feels able to support Flintshire making representations to English authorities, to the Department of National Heritage and to the Arts Council of England to facilitate discussion on whether there is scope to maintain the theatre. I do not know whether that support is possible, but my local authorities certainly desire it, and I am sure that people in my area would welcome it.

This has been an important opportunity to debate the future of Theatr Clwyd. It has local support and it is valued, and I hope that the Minister can offer some positive news on the points that I have made. If he provides such news, the theatre will go from strength to strength. The theatre is used by 400,000 people a year and is a valuable source of support; the Minister should support it in his reply.

I pay tribute to all those who have pressed for the retention of Theatr Clwyd. There are some solutions for the £1.5 million deficit from Clwyd county council. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response because he and the Welsh Office have a responsibility for the theatre. Without local government reorganisation, the theatre would not be experiencing this crisis. I know that the Minister has been helpful to date; I look forward to his help today.

8.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have taken a close interest in the future of Theatr Clwyd in recent weeks. When I visited it two weeks ago, I took the opportunity to speak to Mr. Patrick Gilcrest, the manager, and members of the staff. It is the people who work in and for Theatr Clywd who have brought about the qualities that are admired and valued in it, and they certainly deserve the greatest consideration when we think about its future.

I know that the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) has also been much concerned about the theatre, and I pay tribute to him for his constructive contributions to securing the theatre's future. It was in response to his question that my right hon. Friend and I decided to extend the deadline for our offer of help to Theatr Clywd, which would have expired on 8 March but is now open until 31 March. The offer is there on the table to enable the local authorities to respond as the hon. Gentleman wishes them to do.

As the hon. Gentleman said, there is a shared appreciation on both sides of the House for the artistic quality of Theatr Clwyd's work, particularly among my ministerial colleagues. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the presence in the Chamber of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth). The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) was also here for the start of the debate, and he is equally concerned about the theatre. Within the Welsh Office, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales—my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards)—has constantly pressed the theatre's interests.

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

The future of Theatr Clwyd has recently seemed to be under threat as a result, it is claimed, of local government reorganisation in Wales. However, I believe that that is nought but a red herring and it is necessary to recap the history of the matter before looking to the future.

This year, Theatr Clwyd is receiving £2 million in subsidy from the taxpayer, £1.5 million of which came from Clwyd county council and £0.5 million from the Arts Council of Wales. Last year, the Welsh Office and Welsh local government undertook a joint exercise to disaggregate county and district council standard spending assessments and budgets on a unitary authority basis. The Welsh Office used the disaggregated budgets to calculate provisional notional amount figures, which were issued for consultation in December.

Final notional amount figures, which form the basis for provisional capping principles, were approved by the House on 8 February. With the exception of slight reservations on the part of Powys, all unitary authorities in the Clwyd county council area accepted that the notional amount calculations were fair and reasonable. At no time during consultation was any alternative basis put forward for disaggregation involving Theatr Clwyd expenditure.

The £1.5 million per year that Clwyd county council budgeted to spend on running Theatr Clwyd this financial year was allocated to Flintshire county council in the disaggregation exercise and is included in that authority's notional amount. Under our provisional capping proposals, Flintshire was able to set a budget requirement up to 3.5 per cent. above its notional amount. I understand that Flintshire has set its budget requirement for 1996-97 at the maximum level implied by the capping proposals, but including only £600,000 for Theatr Clwyd. Therefore, although Flintshire has inherited the spending power to fund Theatr Clwyd, the authority appears to be using its discretion to divert some of that spending power to support other services.

As the House knows, the Government have essentially no power to direct how local authorities spend their money: that is local democracy, and councils should be accountable to their local electors. I make no comment today on the merits of Flintshire's decision, but it is important to put it on the record that that authority had the spending power, within its capping limit, to support Theatr Clwyd to the same extent as Clwyd county council had this year. Local government reorganisation has therefore been no cause of the situation before us today: it is Flintshire's decision to contribute only £600,000 that places the theatre in immediate jeopardy.

In those circumstances, and given the importance that we attach to Theatr Clwyd, the Welsh Office and the Arts Council of Wales offered assistance. First, the Arts Council of Wales, with Welsh Office approval, agreed to pay Theatr Clwyd its annual grant of £500,000 in the first quarter of the new financial year rather than in instalments throughout the year, thereby easing the company's short-term financial position and allowing it to confirm its artistic programme for the first part of the year.

Secondly, on 8 February my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State offered £1,300,000 to pay off Theatr Clwyd's accumulated capital debt with, according to its business plan, a saving to the company of £200,000 every year. Thirdly, the Arts Council of Wales announced on 9 February its intention to increase the annual grant to the theatre by £200,000, from £500,000 to £700,000. By any standards, that was a major package of additional support from central Government, but we made it clear that those additional resources were available only provided that local authorities demonstrated their own commitment to the future of Theatr Clwyd to enable it to continue to operate as now and for the foreseeable future.

My right hon. Friend invited Flintshire county council to undertake urgent discussions with neighbouring local authorities and other interested parties and to report back. It now has until the end of the month to do so.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about possible exemptions from capping. I have to tell him that the legal basis for the capping of local authority budgets requires that any decision to designate an authority must be in accordance with general principles which shall be the same for all authorities falling within the same class. That means that in the case of the new unitary authorities in Wales, the same general principles apply to all 22 authorities. It is not possible to determine additional non-general principles disregarding specific expenditure by certain authorities only. That is therefore not an option open to my right hon. Friend, in relation to either 1996-97 or, as the legislation stands, 1997-98 and beyond.

The present position is that we must await a response from Flintshire before we can decide whether to release the £1,300,000 conditionally offered to pay the theatre's debt. Press reports indicate that Wrexham borough council and Denbighshire county council have each agreed to contribute to the support of the theatre for 1996-97 but not necessarily for future years. I understand that Clwyd county council—before it goes out of existence, as the hon. Gentleman described it, on 31 March—will also make a contribution towards the theatre's 1996-97 costs. If the position is as described in the press reports, I am afraid that the future of Theatr Clwyd remains uncertain.

My right hon. Friend has made his offer, and the Under-Secretary of State for Wales—my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West—and I await local government's response. When that response is received we shall need to consider, with the Arts Council of Wales, whether for 1996-97 and future years the response meets the terms of our offer and justifies releasing the £1,300,000.

We shall need to be sure that there is a reasonable prospect of the company being able to continue to operate as a producing house with its high artistic levels for the foreseeable future without a plunge back into crisis or renewed appeals to the Welsh Office for further assistance. It is not sufficient just to keep the theatre open: my right hon. Friend and I look to local government to propose a sure foundation for the continuing operation of a centre of artistic excellence. Without that, paying off the capital debt would serve no useful purpose. I am glad to note from the statement issued yesterday by Councillor Walmsley on behalf of Clwyd county council that it is intended that proposals will be formulated to secure the long-term future. I look forward to those proposals.

Mr. Hanson: Will the Minister agree to officials from his office being party to any discussions?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman anticipates me. I was about to respond to his question about future Welsh Office involvement. It is not appropriate for officials from the Welsh Office to participate in planning the long-term artistic future of Theatr Clwyd. That is a matter for the Arts Council of Wales, and I am confident that it will wish to be closely involved. After all, on current plans the Arts Council of Wales will be the biggest single contributor to the finances of Theatr Clwyd. The hon. Gentleman can therefore be reassured it will continue to take a close interest in the future of Theatr Clwyd on my Department's behalf. I will certainly draw the chairman's attention to the hon. Gentleman's proposal for a meeting.

As for support from England, I understand that the Arts Council of England could not provide support for Theatr Clwyd's activities in Wales although it might be possible for that council, if it so wished, to support touring activities by Theatr Clwyd in England. That might be a matter for future consideration, but it is certainly the case that English local authorities across the border from Clwyd could provide support for the company's work. I hope that they may be persuaded to provide support if and when Theatr Clwyd's long-term future is secured.

I confirm that the Welsh Office has received more than 1,000 letters on the subject, all but a handful urging the theatre's survival. A majority have come from England, from the north-west down to the midlands. Perhaps some of the letter writers will already have written to their local authorities. My right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen) and my hon. Friends the Members for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) have certainly already raised this matter.

I very much hope that local government's response will be sufficient. If so, the future governance of Theatr Clwyd will also require consideration. While this must be a matter for the interested parties, which will obviously include the Arts Council of Wales, I see some attraction in the option outlined in Theatr Clwyd's business plan, submitted by Flintshire county council, for the establishment of an independent limited company or trust with charitable status to run Theatr Clwyd. That seems the best way to assure its successful future—an aspiration which I believe that we all share and wish to see come about.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes past Eight o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 4 March 1996

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Fundamental Expenditure Review

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government intend to implement the recommendation in the ODA's fundamental expenditure review, paragraph 13.37, that the ODA should, reduce further contributions to UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme; and what account was taken of UNICEF's management review. [18339]

Mr. Hanley: In autumn 1996 we shall be reviewing progress on reform in UN development agencies, including UNDP and UNICEF. This review will take account of evaluations such as UNICEF's management review.

Meanwhile, we have just announced that our 1996 contributions to UNDP and UNICEF will be maintained at last year's levels.

Land Mines

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department has given to other countries who have suffered from military conflict in the clearance of land mines; and if he will make a statement. [18262]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Blanau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 19 February 1996 *Official Report*, column *24*, as amended. A copy of the list of commitments has been placed in the Library of the House.

ODA mine clearance actions since April 1993 (as at 15 February 1996)

£

Country	*Project*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Afghanistan	Halo: Mine clearance and mine awareness in the Shomali Valley	416,131	223,087	275,000
Afghanistan	UNOCHA: Minefield surveying, planning and management; mine awareness; clearance and clearance Training	500,000	1,000,000	750,000
Angola	MAG: Minefield survey and marking (4 months) Luena, Moxico province, Phase I (£223,243) and Phase II (£498,825)	—	722,068	300,000
Angola	Halo: Recce, surveying and demining (5 months) Benguela/Kuito corridor Phase I (£259,243) and Phase II (£640,430 + £103,570)	—	899,430	303,570
Angola	Central Mines Action Office within UCAH: two staff posts for one year + equipment and office support costs	—	226,029	—
Cambodia	Halo: Mine clearance in Banteay Meanchey and Siem Reap	277,142	376,549	198,350
Cambodia	MAG: Mine clearance in Battambang	50,625	316,876	271,388
Cambodia	Support of Cambodian Mine Action Centre (through UNDP)	1,133,333	1,000,000	—
Northern Iraq	MAG: Training and mine clearance in Halabja	200,439	—	444,750
Laos	MAG: Mine eradication and community education programme in Xieng Khouang Province	—	—	454,386
Laos	UNDP: 6 months x Programme Management Adviser (PMA) to support Lao national mine clearance programme + 12 months x UN Volunteer to support PMA	—	—	89,000
Mozambique	Halo: Demining of roads in Zambezia Province (Phases I and II)	574,586	414,832	561,000
Rwanda	Support to UN training and equipment of Rwanda mine clearance teams: 20 x Schiebel 19/2 detectors	—	30,000	—
Somalia NW	Rimfire: Mine clearance training; clearance management; mine awareness in and around Hargeisa	—	—	—
Yemen	Support to UN appeal	—	100,000	—

ODA mine clearance actions since April 1993 (as at 15 February 1996)

£

Country	*Project*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Global	Defence Research Agency: 6 months research into mine detection	—	104,928	—
Global	Contribution to UNDHA's Voluntary Trust Fund for Mine Clearance	—	500,000	—
Total	—	3,152,256	5,913,799	3,647,444
Total of ODA's Bilateral mine clearance/awareness actions since April 1993				12,713,499

DEFENCE

Construction Skills Certification Scheme

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action his Department is taking to ensure that personnel on its construction sites have construction skills certification scheme accreditation. [17436]

Mr. Arbuthnot: MOD-appointed contractors have specific health and safety responsibilities and are expected to comply with the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994.

The competence of principal contractors is verified by a planning supervisor, a commercial appointment acting for the MOD. Verification of the accreditation of sub-contractors appointed by the principal contractor is the responsibility of the principal contractor concerned.

Fire Safety (Wheelchairs)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the relative risk to *(a)* employees confirmed to wheelchairs and *(b)* other employees in the event of a fire within a Ministry of Defence building following implementation of his Department's new regulations for placing employees confined to wheelchairs in protected areas. [18048]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department's arrangements for employees confined to wheelchairs follow building regulations and British standards which apply alike to Government Departments and the private sector. No departmental assessment was therefore necessary.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's plans to introduce rooms specified for employees confined to wheelchairs in the event of a fire. [18044]

Mr. Arbuthnot: MOD complies with building regulations and British standards which apply equally to other Government Departments and the private sector. The Ministry is satisfied that as they stand these deal adequately with fireproof areas for the protection of all staff, including disabled people, and has no plans to introduce further measures.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the organisations *(a)* of disabled people and *(b)* representing disabled people his Department consulted before formulating its proposed regulations for evacuating disabled employees from Ministry of Defence buildings in the event of fire. [18043]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Ministry's arrangements follow the regulations which apply alike to Government Departments and the private sector. The Ministry of Defence neither has, nor proposes to have, its own regulations for evacuating people from buildings in the event of fire.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of introducing fireproof rooms for employees confined to wheelchairs within his Department; and if the rooms will be introduced throughout his Department only in response to the number and distribution of employees already in employment that are confined to wheelchairs. [18045]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The need to protect all staff, including disabled people, in the event of fire is a fundamental part of building design embodied in the building regulations and British standards which apply to all MOD buildings. It cannot be presented as a separate cost. Specific local contingency plans are maintained to take account of the number and distribution of employees in wheelchairs.

NAAFI

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to announce his implementation plan following the conclusion of the Dart report into the NAAFI; and if he will consult interested parties. [18511]

Mr. Soames: It is not the Government's intention to publish an implementation plan in regard to taking forward the recommendations of the Dart report into NAAFI. The plan, if it is to be successful, must be wholly owned and implemented by NAAFI's board of management.

The steering group set up to advise Mr. Dart has accepted an implementation plan which will now need to be considered by the NAAFI Council. The NAAFI main board has been consulted in the development of the plan and accepted it in principle at their board meeting on 23 February 1996.

As detailed work on the plan progresses consultations will be held with all relevant organisations.

Homosexuality Policy Assessment

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the homosexuality policy assessment team has completed its assessment; and if he will make a statement. [19206]

Mr. Soames: The homosexuality policy assessment team has, following an exhaustive and wide ranging consultation exercise involving personnel from all three

services, together with staffs from overseas defence forces, now produced its report, copies which have today been placed in the Library of the House. The team's assessment is that any relaxation of the existing policy is likely to have a detrimental effect on operational effectiveness. For that reason, the Government will continue to support the existing policy of excluding homosexuals from the armed forces.

The Ministry of Defence will shortly be submitting a paper of evidence, based on the team's report, to the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill to assist in its deliberations on the subject.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what actions he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take as a result of the recommendations of the Scott report. [16958]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the speech made by the President of the Board of Trade on 26 February, *Official Report*, columns 590–604.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultation he had with the Secretary to the Cabinet concerning the Government's response to the Scott inquiry; and where and when such consultations took place. [16603]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Successive Governments have not disclosed the nature or the specific sources of the advice they receive from the civil service.

Former Civil Servants

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what changes he plans to make to the rules on business appointments of former civil servants. [19075]

Mr. Freeman: I have today placed in the Libraries of both Houses, for consultation, the proposed text of the revised rules for civil servants. The substantive changes give effect to the recommendations of the Nolan committee on standards in public life by bringing special advisers within the system and by allowing the Prime Minister's advisory committee on business appointments to publicly announce the reasons for its decisions and to advise a civil servant that the acceptance of a particular appointment is inappropriate. We intend that the revised rules will come into effect on 1 April 1996 and will finalise the necessary amendments to the civil service management code in consultation with the Council of Civil Service Unions.

ENVIRONMENT

Oil Pollution

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further measures he proposes to take to protect the United Kingdom coastline against oil pollution from merchant ships; and if he will make a statement. [17596]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and I are already taking forward relevant recommendations of the Donaldson report following the Braer accident as announced in the Government response to that report. In addition, we shall be working together with our right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and our right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in looking at the lessons to be learnt from the Sea Empress incident.

Domestic Water Bills

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what research he has commissioned to establish the correlation between household income and domestic water bills based on *(a)* an unmeasured and *(b)* a measured charging basis; [18155]

(2) what research he has evaluated from the Director General of Water Services relating to information supplied by water and sewage undertakers, in respect of the correlation between household income and domestic water and sewerage bills based on *(a)* an unmeasured and *(b)* a measured charging basis. [18154]

Mr. Clappison: My Department and Ofwat jointly commissioned a report, "The Social Impact of Water Metering" from W. S. Atkins Planning and Management Consultants, which was published in August 1992. In addition, the Office of Water Services commissioned a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, "The Distributional Effects of Different Methods of Charging Households for Water and Sewerage Services." That report was published in August 1993. Copies of both reports are in the Library.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what parties are now involved in discussions on the future of Battersea power station; and if he will make a statement. [18087]

Sir Paul Beresford: Discussions are continuing between Wandsworth council, English Heritage and the owners on a master plan for the whole Battersea power station site. The Government would like to see the future development of this important site on the River Thames resolved as soon as possible.

Drinking Water

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what action he will take in response to the House of Lords European Communities Select Committee fourth report, HL31 of Session 1995–96, with regard to lead in drinking water; [18495]

(2) what action he plans in response to the conclusions of the House of Lords European Communities Select Committee fourth report, HL31 of Session 1995–96, in respect of the dosing of drinking water with chemicals; [18499]

(3) what assessment he has made of the conclusion of the House of Lords European Communities Select Committee fourth report, HL31 of Session 1995–96, in

respect of the urgency with which the problems of removing lead from drinking water have been approached; [18497]

(4) if he will implement a national strategy for the replacement of all domestic lead piping within a 15-year period. [18496]

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend is considering the report from the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities about Commission proposals for a revised drinking water directive, and will respond to it, including the recommendation for a national strategy, in due course.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he plans to remove lead from drinking water. [18498]

Mr. Clappison: Water companies have installed treatment to reduce lead levels at consumers' taps. In addition they have programmes for replacing lead communication pipes. Lead levels in drinking water supplies are now lower than they have ever been.

Water and Sewerage Companies (Surplus Land)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *76–77*, if he will make it his policy to allow public access to information regarding the projected and actual capital receipts of water and sewerage companies from the sale of surplus land. [18213]

Mr. Clappison: The Director General of Water Services has not since 1989 required water and sewerage companies to report projections of receipts from the sale of surplus land. Aggregate capital receipts from the sale of assets in the preceding financial year, including receipts from the sale of surplus land, are given in companies' annual reports.

Safety Signs Directive

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what actions the Health and Safety Executive has taken in response to EC directive 92/58/EEC on safety signs in relation to United Kingdom brands of tampons; [18561]

(2) what action he is taking to ensure that tampons containing man-made fibre display a safety warning sign on the packets to comply with EC directive 92/58/EEC; [18558]

(3) if he will list the products which are required to comply with EC directive 92/58/EEC on safety signs. [18560]

Sir Paul Beresford: The EC Safety Signs Directive 92/58/EEC was made under article 118A of the treaty of Rome. This article exclusively concerns health and safety requirements for the workplace. Article 1 of the directive specifically excludes signs used in the marketing of products, and therefore no action of the sort envisaged by the hon. Member is required.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions on EC directive 92/58/EEC on safety signs have been held *(a)* in the Council of Ministers and *(b)* with the Commission. [18564]

Sir Paul Beresford: The European Commission first produced proposals in 1989 for a directive to replace an earlier, 1977, safety signs directive. A formal proposal to the Council of Ministers was published in early 1991, and common position was agreed by December of that year. The directive was then adopted by the Council of Ministers in June 1992.

Sea Empress

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to improve environmental protection following the grounding of the Sea Empress. [18468]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment will continue to liaise closely with the statutory environmental protection and nature conservation agencies. The agencies are currently advising local authorities on the best means of ensuring environmental protection in the wake of the Sea Empress oil spill. That advice is being given on the basis of experience and on the findings and recommendations given by the ecological steering groups on the oil spill in Shetland after the grounding of the Braer in January 1993. The success of measures undertaken to protect the environment, and specifically wildlife and habitats, will be reviewed in the light of experience gained in dealing with the current incident.

Rough Sleepers Initiative

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the next phase of the rough sleepers initiative. [19135]

Mr. Curry: The rough sleepers initiative which has operated in central London since 1990 has been an outstanding example of co-operation between Government and voluntary organisations to bring effective help to people in the greatest need. This partnership to tackle the problems of people sleeping rough in central London has helped thousands of people to start a new life away from the streets, and has prevented many more from having to sleep rough. When the rough sleepers initiative began, voluntary sector agencies estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 people were sleeping rough in central London. The numbers now sleeping rough in this area have fallen to around 270 on any one night. This is a tremendous achievement.

By the end of this month, the Government will have invested over £180 million through the initiative, providing at least 3,300 permanent homes, 950 short-term hostel places, 700 places in flats and houses leased from the private sector for up to three years, an annual winter shelter programme of up to 400 beds—with further emergency beds available during episodes of particularly severe weather—and, importantly, year-round outreach and resettlement work to engage people sleeping rough and to support them in moving to new accommodation.

The White Paper "Our Future Homes: Opportunity, Choice, Responsibilities", published in June 1995, confirmed that the Government would continue a programme to help people sleeping rough in central London beyond March 1996, and would also consider

assisting the development of the rough sleepers initiative model in areas outside central London where rough sleeping could be demonstrated to be a major problem.

In October 1995, the Government issued a consultation paper on future plans for the initiative. The paper invited views on a number of proposals for continuing the initiative in central London. It also asked local authorities outside central London to assess the extent of rough sleeping in their areas. 258 responses to the consultation document were received.

Following analysis of those responses, I am publishing today a strategy paper, "Rough Sleepers Initiative, The Next Challenge", which sets out our plans for a third phase of the Initiative over the next three years. 1996–97 to 1998–99. The emphasis of the third phase will be on providing extra help for the hard core of people who have been sleeping rough for considerable periods of time, often because they suffer complex problems, such as mental ill health, alcohol or drug misuse, which require special care.

My Department plans to make £73 million available over the next three years to fund the third phase of the rough sleepers initiative. In addition, we plan to make £25 million available over the same period in grants under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 to voluntary sector agencies for the relief of homelessness.

In central London, our plans for the third phase of the Initiative are to fund:

- the provision of at least 250 new homes providing permanent accommodation for people sleeping rough;
- up to 40 beds in permanent high care accommodation for the homeless mentally ill;
- up to 200 new beds in hostel accommodation;
- continued funding for some hostel and night shelter accommodation already funded under the initiative;
- ring-fencing of up to 80 beds in existing hostels, about 30 of which would be for clients with disruptive behaviour and 50 specifically for clients referred by outreach agencies;
- up to 30 beds in a new "wet" hostel for people sleeping rough who have drink problems;
- an annual programme of winter shelters for people at risk of sleeping rough during the coldest months of the year; and
- more effective outreach and resettlement work.

Also, we plan to retain the clearing house system as a means of allocating permanent accommodation until at least March 1997; and to uphold the current criteria for access to permanent accommodation—people sleeping rough or with a clear history of sleeping rough.

Responses to the consultation document did not provide clear, quantified evidence of a major problem with rough sleeping in any area beyond central London. Therefore, our plans for the rest of England will impact in two stages.

First, we will extend the rough sleepers initiative to Bristol, the only area outside central London where a major rough sleeping problem has been demonstrated conclusively. Bristol city council is invited to form a consortium with voluntary sector organisations, the private sector, housing associations, the Housing Corporation, the police, health care providers and other relevant bodies. The consortium will be expected to agree a local strategy for targetting rough sleeping in Bristol, and to bid for Government resources.

Secondly, we will be proposing further evaluation of the extent of rough sleeping in 23 other areas where local authorities have identified a possible problem, before deciding whether there is a need to extend the initiative further. These areas are Basingstoke, Bath, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Brighton, Cambridge, Exeter, Gloucester, Leicester, Manchester, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Reading, Tunbridge Wells, York; and the London boroughs of Barnet, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Richmond upon Thames, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.

As part of the Government's strategy, the Department of Health is further developing the homeless mentally ill initiative to complement the extension of the RSI by making available £2 million per year form the mental illness specific grant—MISG. This nearly doubles the £2.2 million per year already spent from the MISG on this initiative, which has so far cost over £20 million. The additional resources will target both the care needs of those requiring long-term high care accommodation and will also enable specialist staff to provide support to those with mental heath problems in direct access hostels. This additional help to local authorities will enable the Government to build on the successes already achieved in central London and to develop services for homeless mentally ill people based on the lessons learned from the HMII in other centres.

The Government are committed to ensuring that there is no necessity to sleep rough. What I am announcing today aims to achieve this.

Copies of the strategy paper have been placed in the Library and the Vote Office. Copies of the responses may be viewed at the Department of the Environment's library.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the total expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity for each of the years *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1989–90, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95 and *(f)* 1995–96 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole year; what estimate he has made of such expenditure for 1996–97; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (1) advertising and (2) press and public relations. [11396]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 25 January 1996]:* Paid publicity expenditure by my Department—excluding agencies and non-departmental public bodies—is as follows:

(a) 1979–80: [figures not available]

(b) 1989–90: £31,500,000

(c) 1991–92: £3,387,000

(d) 1993–94: £12,108,000

(e) 1994–95: £8,878,000

(f) 1995–95:

(i) To date: £4,902,700

out of planned total expenditure for the year of £6,835,900.

Of this, expenditure on television, radio and newspaper advertising was as follows:

1989–90: £19,810,000

1991–92: £680,870

1993–94: 5,149,000

1994–95: £4,470,000

1995–96:

Expenditure to date £2,800,000

The figure for 1989–90 incudes publicity costs associated with water privatisation. Figures for 1996–97 are not yet available.

Press relations are handled by members of the Government information service whose salaries are paid as part of the Department's annual running costs. Paid publicity is the most cost-effective way to raise public awareness and understanding of the Department's policies.

Publicity expenditure by the Department's agencies is the responsibility of the respective chief executives. I have ask them to reply to the hon. Member direct as soon as possible. Expenditure by non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

Letter from R. D. Budden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 8 February 1996.

Sir Paul Beresford at The Department of the Environment asked Professor Rhind, the Chief Executive of Ordnance Survey, to let you have the information you requested about expenditure on advertising and press and public relations. Professor Rhind is currently away from the office on business and I am responding on his behalf.

I regret that the figures for 1979–80 are not available but the remainder of the information is contained in the table below.

£ thousand

	Advertising	*Press and public relations*
1989–90	321.0	825.5
1991–92	420.0	828.3
1993–94	189.0	890.4
1994–95	478.0	940.3
1995–96[1,2]	458.7	858.4
	674.8	1,030.0
1996–97 (budget)	748.0	1,085.5

[1] To January 1996.
[2] Budget for year.

The trend indicated by the table is reliable. However, in absolute terms, the figures are not always comparable, one year with another, owing to the constantly changing mix of activities which have been allocated to these accounting sub-heads, in turn reflecting the dynamic nature of the organisation.

I hope this information satisfies your requirement.

Letter from M.C. Buck to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 29 February 1996:

The following is the information you require in relation to the QE2 Conference Centre:

Year	*Advertising*	*Press and Public Relations*	*Total*
(A) 1979–80	(Centre not in operation until 1986)		Nil
(B) 1989–90	(figures not available)		—
(C) 1991–92	£50,000	£52,000	£102,000
(D) 1993–94	£65,000	£33,000	£98,000
(E) 1994–95	£61,000	£35,000	£96,000
(F) 1995–96	£36,000	£39,000	£75,000

I should be grateful if you would confirm receipt.

Letter from Roger Courtney to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 28 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply on behalf of the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to your recent Parliamentary Question about expenditure on publicity.

The primary purpose of BRE's publicity expenditure is to promote the results from publicity funded research, to help secure maximum application. Thus our publicity expenditures include paying for articles to be drafted for publication in the trade press, participation in exhibitions, organisation of press events and publishing News of Construction Research. Expenditure in the years requested has been:

(a) 1979–80: [figures not available]

(b) 1989–90: [figures not available]

(c) 1991–92: [figures not available]

(d) 1993–94: £182.6k

(e) 1994–95: £181.8k

(f) 1995–96:

(i) to date £185.4k

(ii) estimated for whole year £202.0k

(g) 1996–97: Budgets not yet set but likely to be similar to previous years

No detailed breakdown between "advertising" and "press and public relations" is available but BRE does not promote its work through press advertising and therefore any advertising expenditure would be very small.

These figures exclude recruitment advertising and publicity funded directly by the former Energy Efficiency Office in connection with their Best Practice Programme.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 12 February 1996:

Further to the answer given by Sir Paul Beresford on 6 February 1996 in response to your Parliamentary Question about publicity costs, I am writing with details of the Agency's expenditure on the this front.

The only costs incurred by the Planning inspectorate over the relevant period were £4,757 in 1995–96. These costs were incurred in connection with the launch of the Planning Inspectorate Journal No other publicity costs were incurred in any of the other periods mentioned, and none are planned for 1996–97.

Housing Associations

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the funding available for new rented housing association homes in 1996–97; if the expenditure levels in the 1993 autumn statement have been maintained for each local authority in Yorkshire and Humberside. [15485]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* The 1996–97 funding allocations made by the Housing Corporation in Yorkshire and Humberside for the provision of new build rented housing by housing associations are as listed. The Housing Corporation's estimate of what the allocations may have been for 1996–97 if funding plans in the 1993 autumn statement had been maintained are also listed. These estimates can be only hypothetical since the actual allocations depend on a series of factors including the nature of the schemes submitted by housing associations, local housing needs, local authority involvement and value for money. In any one year, activity by housing associations in a particular authority area can vary according to the schemes proposed and approved.

Local Authority	1996–97 Allocations (£million)	Estimate of Allocations Based on 1993 Autumn Statement (£million)
Barnsley	1.00	1.17
Bradford	6.94	8.10
Calderdale	1.90	2.22
Craven	0.22	0.26
Doncaster	1.63	1.90
East Riding	1.69	1.97
Hambleton	0.44	0.51
Harrogate	0.88	1.03
Kingston-on-Hull	2.73	3.19
Kirklees	3.49	4.07
Leeds	5.96	6.96
North East Lincolnshire	1.60	1.87
North Lincolnshire	0.81	0.95
Richmondshire	0.32	0.37
Rotherham	0.71	0.83
Ryedale	0.20	0.23
Scarborough	0.86	1.00
Selby	0.33	0.39
Sheffield	4.32	5.04
Wakefield	1.91	2.23
York	0.89	1.04
Total	38.83	45.33

In addition, the Housing Corporation also makes funding allocations for social lettings provided through the purchase and rehabilitation of properties; the corporation's new build programme for shared ownership; and the corporation's other home ownership initiatives which release existing social lettings for reletting to others in housing need. Local authorities may also support housing association developments with local authority housing association grant.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has to review the current level of funding for research into Alzheimer's disease; and if he will make a statement. [17514]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The DTI's support of research into Alzheimer's disease is funded through the research councils from the science budget. The councils determine research priorities and review funding as part of their annual business planning process.

Medical Research

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria are used by the Medical Research Council to determine future research priorities; and if he will make a statement. [17513]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Medical Research Council has a broad remit across all areas of research relevant to maintaining and improving human health. The following broad criteria underpin its strategy for determining priorities; degree of scientific opportunity; such as the scope for high-quality, productive research; the needs of society, including opportunity for improving quality of life and for wealth creation; and the need to maintain a reasonable balance of activity across key areas of MRC's remit, to co-ordinate with other funders and users and to promote interdisciplinarity and integration between basic and clinical research.

Environmental Technology Companies

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total amount of grant investment incentives awarded to British environmental industries in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [17598]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Camarthen (Mr. Williams) on 19 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *44*. Grants made under schemes designed specifically to promote research and development in, or the takeup of, environment technologies totalled £2.6 million in the period 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1995.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to improve market access for British environmental technology companies; and if he will make a statement. [17595]

Mr. Taylor: The Joint DTI-DOE environmental markets unit, which is the lead sponsor division in Government for the environmental industry, is working with the industry to assist it in identifying the factors that affect the industry's competitiveness and in developing a long-term strategy for improved performance.

Colliery Sales

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department has received on the sale of *(a)* Houghton main colliery and *(b)* Woolley colliery. [18432]

Mr. Page: I am not aware of any recent representations to my Department about these sites.

British Coal (Property)

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the British Coal property sites remaining in public ownership, and their acreage. [18431]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for British Coal.

Mineworkers and Supervisors Pension Fund

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will meet the trustees of the mineworkers and supervisors pension fund to assess their views before he has further negotiations with other parties interested in taking over the fund's management. [18664]

Mr. Page: Negotiations with parties interested in acquiring the management of the funds of the coal pension schemes are a matter for British Coal and the trustees. As guarantor, my consent is required under the schemes' rules to the appointment of a new fund manager.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Government are seeking fresh bids for the management of the mineworkers and supervisors pension fund; and what is the estimated timetable. [18665]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for British coal and the trustees. I understand that discussions between British Coal and the trustees are continuing.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to public funds to date of efforts to sell the mineworkers and supervisors pension fund; and who will meet these costs. [18666]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for British Coal as the vendor of CINMan.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Government will now make it a condition of the sale of the mineworkers and supervisors pension fund business that the buyer keep the existing CINMan team. [18667]

Mr. Page: It will be for the parties concerned to agree on the terms of any sale.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been his Department's involvement in the departure of the chief executive of CINMan; and who will fund his redundancy settlement. [18663]

Mr. Page: My Department has been kept informed of British Coal's plans for the re-organisation of CINMan. As guarantor of the coal pensions schemes, I have a common interest with the coal pensioners in ensuring the proper and effective management of the pension funds. The terms of the settlement are a matter for the parties concerned.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultation he has had with the member of the European Commission responsible for regional development concerning the award of powers to member states to swap areas currently eligible for objective 2 status for new areas currently ineligible; and if he will make a statement. [18837]

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friends and I, and the UK permanent representative to the European Communities, have repeatedly and consistently expressed to Commissioner Wulf-Maties our view that the present list of areas eligible for grants under objective 2 of the EC structural funds should remain unchanged. We have not suggested any swapping of areas.

Nuclear Decommissioning

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on each of the payments made from the Drawmops—decommissioning and waste management operational programmes—fund since its inception. [18064]

Mr. Page: The DTI has been funding United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority decommissioning and waste management work under the Drawmops programme since 1986—when the UKAEA was set up as a trading fund.

There is no separate Drawmops fund. The programme is paid for by an annual grant. Drawmops payments each year have been as follows:

Year	*£ Million*
1986–87	15.77
1987–88	28.92
1988–89	34.21
1989–90	42.61
1990–91	82.76
1991–92	104.62
1992–93	125.00
1993–94	120.80
1994–95	126.71

Digital Broadcasting

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards conditional access systems for digital broadcasting. [16372]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government published proposals for the regulation of conditional access systems for digital television on 15 January 1996. The Government consider it necessary to set out a clear regulatory framework for the new markets in digital television. Our proposals also meet our obligations under the recent television standards directive.

In contrast with current analogue broadcasts, all digital broadcasts—terrestrial, satellite and cable—will require access to the viewer's television via decoding receiver "set-top box". These receivers or boxes will also implement any conditional access service, which ensures that only viewers having a valid contract with a broadcaster or multiplexor can receive and view their programmes. As such these conditional access points will be a gateway between all viewers and all broadcasters for every delivery mechanism. Regulation is designed to prevent any abuse of this "gatekeeping" role and to discourage anti-competitive behaviour. It is also important that those who will be investing in the new markets have a clear understanding of the regulatory framework at the outset, so that they can invest with confidence in these long-term ventures.

Our proposals are designed to stimulate early development of digital television in the UK. They are based on the existing framework for telecommunications licensing. Licences would be issued by the DTI and enforced by the Office of Telecommunications, in close co-operation with the Independent Television Commission. Copies of our proposals have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Ariane 5 Programme

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the United Kingdom has joined the Ariane 5 programme; and when its first launch is due to take place. [19205]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am pleased to confirm that the UK has joined the Ariane 5 programme. The Government have committed £2.8 million to this project up to the year 2000. The European Space Agency plans to carry out the first launch of Ariane 5 on 15 May 1996 and its payload

will be the four-satellite ESA science mission, "Cluster". UK industry contributed significantly to Ariane 4, which captured 60 per cent. of the world market for launching commercial satellites. This new programme will enable UK companies to transfer their skills and to pursue competitive opportunities well into the next century.

UK companies and UK science have helped to make Ariane 4 a success story by supplying specialist systems and components for the launcher and for ground control. Until now, the UK Government have chosen not to contribute to the next generation, Ariane 5, which was originally designed to launch the European spaceplane Hermes. However, welcoming the fact that Ariane 5 has since been more clearly matched to the worldwide needs of customers wanting to launch the next generation of communication and scientific satellites, we agreed last year to reconsider that earlier decision. As a full member of Ariane 5, we can support this important collaborative endeavour and ensure access to cost effective and highly reliable launch services. This is of particular importance to the UK as we are Europe's largest users of space-derived services. In addition, I have asked the British national space centre to consider exploitation of other flexible launch systems appropriate to small payloads for specific experiments.

My announcement coincides with confirmation today by ESA and the French space agency, CNES, of the start of prepartions for the first launch of Ariane 5.

I would like to congratulate those UK companies who are already suppliers to Arianespace and anticipate that my announcement today will lead to further opportunities for them and for other UK companies. This is a fine example of Government and industry working in partnership.

Departmental Severance and Redundancy Scheme

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff from *(a)* the main Department and *(b)* each of its agencies have expressed an interest in his Department's current voluntary early severance and redundancy scheme. [17467]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* Several voluntary early retirement and severance schemes are currently in operation in that part of the Department that falls under gross running cost control. The total number of initial expressions of interest by staff in these schemes is approximately 1,600 but a significant proportion of these are likely to withdraw as the scheme progresses.

I have asked the chief executives of the agencies within net running cost control—Companies House, the Patent Office and Radiocommunications Agency—to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Durham to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 2 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to explain the levels of interest in the current early retirement/severance schemes of Companies House.

We received 16 expressions of interest in the current schemes which are shortly to be concluded.

Letter from J. C. Octon to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 2 March 1996:

In the absence of the Comptroller General on official business I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question about voluntary early retirement and redundancy. The Patent Office is not taking part in the current Departmental schemes but has its own programmes for early retirement and voluntary severance. These have attracted 115 expressions of interest; 15 staff were released in 1995 and a further 81 will be leaving in the first 6 months of 1996. There have been no compulsory redundancies.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 2 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your Written Parliamentary Question about the DTI's current voluntary early severance and redundancy scheme.

The Agency has its own voluntary early retirement schemes. These concern (i) certain Senior and Higher Telecommunications Technical Officers and all seven staff who expressed interest will be retiring at the end of next month, and (ii) certain Personal Secretaries, none of whom expressed interest in early retirement.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Export Licences

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs what applications for export licenses have been reviewed by his Department, and rejected on the grounds that the application indicated a possible nuclear end use for the export, under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1991 and Export of Goods (control) (Amendment No. 7) Order 1991. [18531]

Mr. David Davis: We are responsible for advising on the foreign policy implications of any proposed export of controlled goods referred to it by the Department of Trade and Industry. All applications are considered on a case-by-case basis. Final decision on the granting of export licences are a matter for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the proposals his Department has *(a)* made in the last five years and *(b)* proposes to make to the Council of Europe for changes in the text of articles of the European convention on human rights that specify protected rights. [17903]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have made no proposals for any such changes within the last five years. Our present initiative relates to seeking improvements to the way in which the Strasbourg system works.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what derogations from the European convention on human rights have been advised to the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe since 1970 as a result of *(a)* war and *(b)* public emergency; [17904]

(2) which states have to date derogated from the European convention on human rights because of war or public emergency; and if he will show the date and cause of derogation. [17905]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Secretary General of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg acts as depository for notifications made under the convention. In the time available, we have not been able to obtain from him the information about derogations by other states party. I shall write to the hon. Member.

In respect of the United Kingdom, the only derogations made since 1970 relate to certain powers of detention of persons suspected of terrorist acts connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland. Each derogation supersedes its predecessor by revising the references to reflect current legislation. The last such was on 23 March 1989.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what instructions have been given to Her Majesty's embassy in Dublin in respect of advocacy of the union of Great Britain with Northern Ireland. [17906]

Mr. Rifkind: The embassy in Dublin is closely involved in explaining the Government's policies on Northern Ireland, including the Government's commitment to upholding the wish of a greater number of the people of Northern Ireland on the issue of whether they prefer to support the Union or a sovereign united Ireland.

Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) on what date HRH the Princess of Wales informed the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of her intention to make her most recent visit to Pakistan; [18879]

(2) if his Department was consulted by HRH the Princess of Wale before her departure on her most recent visit to Pakistan. [18878]

Mr. Rifkind: The Princess of Wales's household informed this Department on Thursday 15 February of her intention to make a private visit to Pakistan. We were not asked to express a view.

Mr. Niaz Ahmed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the application by Mr. Niaz Ahamed (ref: IMM/C8853) to join his wife in the United Kingdom was referred to his Department for inquires to be made in the United Kingdom; on what date the request was received by his Department; when he expects to make a recommendation; and if he will make a statement. [18469]

Mr. Hanley: I will arrange for the migration and visa department correspondence unit to write to the hon. Member.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he first consulted other Cabinet Ministers about the contents of the report of the Scott inquiry; and where and when such discussions took place and with whom. [16516]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* It is not the practice to give details of ministerial meetings.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to paragraphs D1.27 and D1.28 of the Scott report, if he will list those matters relating to the work of his Department since 1979 classified as matters about which successive Administrations have refused to answer. [17420]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 26 February 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade on 26 February, *Official Report,* Column 592.

South Africa

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European counterparts regarding trade with South Africa and the reduction of trade barriers with that country. [16793]

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 26 February 1996]:* Britain is in the lead in pressing for the liberalisation of trade between the EU and South Africa. South Africa responded positively to the EU's offer of June 1995 to negotiate a free trade area. We need to move forward on this urgently, with the goal of an agreement which will remove as many barriers to trade as possible.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to discuss with his European counterparts the extension of the Lomé convention to South African trade. [16794]

Mr. Davis *[holding answer 26 February 1996]:* Negotiations on South Africa's accession to the Lomé convention are underway. These do not cover trade, which is being pursued separately: South Africa has responded positively to the EU's offer to negotiate a free trade area as part of a wider bilateral agreement on trade and co-operation.

Hussein Kamel

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British representatives interviewed Hussein Kamel in Jordan and on what dates; and if the interview included questions on Mr. Kamel's involvement with Matrix Churchill. [17874]

Mr. Hanley: *[holding answer 28 February 1996]:* As I made clear in my letter of 2 October 1995 to the hon. Member, any such contacts would, by their nature, be confidential.

PRIME MINISTER

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he will take as a result of the finding of the Scott inquiry that the letter written to the hon. Member referred to in paragraph D.4.43 concerning changes in the Government's policy on the supply of arms to Iraq was misleading. [16956]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

The Government continue to take the view that the Howe guidelines were not changed. My right hon. Friend does not consider that further action is necessary.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister what action he proposes in respect of Scott's recommendation, K8.8, that the refusal to answer parliamentary questions on sales of arms or defence-related equipment to other countries should be re-examined. [17054]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

As my right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade made clear in his speech in the House on 26 February, the Government will be considering the extent to which information about overseas defence sales can be publicly disclosed. A background note on "Ministerial Accountability and the Release of Information on Defence Related Exports" has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister if he accepts the observation contained in the Scott report, section K3.3, that the DTI should not continue to be the export licensing authority in respect of goods whose export is primarily the policy concern of some other Department; and if he will make a statement. [17867]

The Deputy Prime Minster: I have been asked to reply.

Sir Richard Scott recommends that consideration should be given as to whether the DTI should continue to be the export licence authority for the good concerned. The Government accept this and propose to publish a consultation paper on export control legislation and procedures. We will reach decisions on particular issues in the light of comments received, in response to the consultation paper.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Prime Minister how many civil servants had direct sight of the Scott report as of 13 February. [15705]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 16 February 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

As of 13 February, only those required to assist the Government in preparing their response to the report, as agreed between the Government and the Scott inquiry.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister what action he will take in response to the conclusion in section K4.1 of the Scott report that the role of Customs and Excise in policing and prosecuting export control offences is anomalous; and if he will make a statement. [17820]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade told the House in his speech during the debate on a motion for the adjournment of 26 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *597*, the Government accept that there are benefits in Sir Richard Scott's recommendation that in future the role of the Attorney-General should include the exercise of increased supervision of Customs and Excise prosecutions in relation to export control matters. The Government are urgently developing proposals on the precise nature and scope of the increased supervision, and the Attorney-General will be reporting to the House as soon as possible.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will enumerate and detail the shortcomings of Government in relation to the Scott report to which he referred during Prime Minister's Question Time on 22 February. [17670]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on Monday 26 February, *Official Report*, column *589*.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to attend a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee; how many officials will attend with him; how many of these will be press officers; and what estimate he has made of the total cost involved. [18571]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend expects to attend shortly. Details of officials and costs are not yet known.

Women's Issues

Ms Jowell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will name the members of the Cabinet committee dealing with women's issues. [18251]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) on 18 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1005–12*.

Iraq (Exports)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will now make public details of the involvement of British companies in Iraq's *(a)* chemical, *(b)* nuclear and *(c)* biological and chemical warfare programmes as communicated to Her Majesty's Government by UNSCOM—the UN special commission on Iraq. [17322]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 26 February 1996]:* I have been asked to reply. UNSCOM has communicated to us in confidence the names of a number of British companies which may have been involved in supplying items found at sites associated with Iraqi programmes to develop weapons of mass destruction. UNSCOM does not make this information public, and it is important that we respect its confidence. UNSCOM considers that a high degree of confidentiality is essential to the successful performance of its work.

Moreover, release of the names included in UNSCOM reports could unreasonably damage the reputation of British companies. It would be wrong to conclude without further analysis that companies whose names might appear in reports from UNSCOM have behaved

wrongfully. Should any evidence of wrongdoing emerge, it will be investigated and, if appropriate, will be a matter for the courts.

Western European Union

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the policies he presented to the Western European Union assembly in London on 23 February; and if he will place a copy of his speech in the Library. [18171]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

This Government's approach is set out in detail in a memorandum of 1 March 1995. Copies of this and of my right hon. Friend's speech to the WEU assembly have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister on what dates between 1987 and 1990 he met officials from the Export Credits Guarantee Department; and if he will make a statement. [17708]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

Advice about policy on export credit cover would normally be given to my right hon. Friends, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer by Treasury officials. It is not possible, without disproportionate cost, to ascertain if, and on what dates, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister may have met ECGD officials between 1987 and 1990. It would, however, have been unusual for Ministers to receive advice on export credit policy from officials other than those in their own Departments.

TRANSPORT

Sea Empress

Mr. Dafis: To ask the secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that local organisations are able to reclaim from the polluter the cost of clean-up, after-care, research and monitoring; and if he will make a statement. [17660]

Mr. Norris: Compensation for cost incurred and economic loss suffered as a result of the oil pollution damage from the Sea Empress, including the costs of reasonable measures taken to prevent or minimise the damage, will be available from the shipowner's insurer and from the international oil pollution compensation fund, which is funded by levies on the oil industry. Temporary arrangements have been put in place to meet claims involving hardship.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the number of sea birds affected by oil originating from the Sea Empress. [18092]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 4 March 1996.

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the number of sea birds affected by oil originating from the 'Sea Empress'.

1216/95/96

Reports received up to 28 February were that 3,806 sea birds has been affected by the SEA EMPRESS spill.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* sea birds and *(b)* other wildlife have been (i) killed and (ii) otherwise affected by oil originating from the Sea Empress. [18360]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 2 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the number of sea birds affected by oil originating from the 'Sea Empress'.

Reports received up to 28 February were that:

(i) 1,403 seabirds have died, but there are no reports of any wildlife deaths.

(ii) 2,403 seabirds and 82 seals have been affected by the spill.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has made to provide compensation to fishermen affected by the oil spill in Pembrokeshire. [18063]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* Compensation for cost incurred and economic loss suffered as a result of the oil pollution damage from the Sea Empress including the costs of reasonable measures taken to prevent or minimise the damage, will be available from the shipowner's insurer and from the international oil pollution compensation fund, which is funded by levies on the oil industry. As stated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales yesterday, officials of relevant Government Departments have brokered an agreement which has enabled temporary arrangements to be put in place to meet claims involving hardship.

Access to Trains (Disabled People)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provision has been made by the Rail Regulator to allow for boarding and alighting from trains by disabled passengers. [17939]

Mr. Watts: As required by the Railways Act 1993, the Rail Regulator has produced a code of practice on meeting the needs of disabled passengers which covers recommendations for the design of rolling stock and stations. All train and station operators are required to submit for the regulator's approval, a disabled persons protection policy, based on this code of practice.

Transport Policies and Programmes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reviews have taken place in the system of allocating funds to local authorities through the transport policies and programmes processing the last five years. [18165]

Mr. Norris: The TPP system is constantly under review, in order to ensure that within the limits of public expenditure Government resources are targeted where they are most needed and where they give optimum value for money. The main changes that have taken place in the last five years are as follows:

1991–92

Resources transferred from the Department of the Environment's revenue support grant (RSG) system to my Department's transport supplementary grant (TSG) system for the assessment, strengthening, and structural maintenance of bridges.

Funds were earmarked for the first time in the local transport settlement for road safety schemes.

1992–93

Further resources transferred from RSG for the structural maintenance of principal ("A") roads forming part of the primary route network.

1993–94

Further resources transferred to TSG for structural maintenance of other principal local roads.

1994–95

The package approach to funding local transport infrastructure was introduced.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what monitoring is undertaken by his Department of how those policies contained in the transport policies and programmes documents submitted to his Department by local highway authorities comply with the local authorities' appropriate development plans; [18163]

(2) what monitoring is undertaken by his Department of how those transport policies contained in the transport policies and programme documents submitted to his Department by local highway authorities comply with PPG13. [18162]

Mr. Norris: The guidance we issue to local authorities makes it clear that the proposals they include in their transport policies and programme submissions are expected to be consistent with local structure and development plans, and with the guidance set out in PPG 13. Staff in my Department and in the Government offices for the regions look for evidence of this consistency when they are assessing local authorities' annual submissions.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the change in the level of pedestrian injuries which has resulted from the use of speed cameras. [18181]

Mr. Norris: National figures are not available. However, in the west London pilot area pedestrian casualties were reduced by 30 per cent.

Drivers (Eyesight)

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many road accidents have occurred in the last five years for which figures are available where one driver involved was driving a passenger service vehicle and required spectacles or contact lenses; [18285]

(2) how many road accidents have occurred in the last five years for which figures are available where one driver involved was driving a passenger service vehicle and was blind in one eye; [18283]

(3) how many road accidents have occurred in the last five years for which figures are available where one driver involved was driving a heavy goods vehicle and required spectacles or contact lenses; [18284]

(4) how many road accidents have occurred in the last five years for which figures are available where one driver involved was driving a heavy goods vehicle and was blind in one eye. [18282]

Mr. Norris: This information is not available.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on EU policy with regard to lorry drivers' eye tests without the use of spectacles. [18875]

Mr. Norris: Among the eyesight standards for drivers of lorries and buses set in the second EC directive on driving licences, which will come into force on 1 July 1996, is a requirement to meet an uncorrected acuity standard, that is, without glasses or contact lenses, of 0.05—equivalent to 3/60 on the Snellen scale. This differs from the regulations in force in the United Kingdom since 1983 only in being required of both eyes rather than one eye only.

Rail Operating Licences

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons the general authority to the Rail Regulator issued under section 8 of the Railways Act 1993 prohibits him from granting licences to public sector operators other than subsidiaries of the British Railways Board; and if he will make a statement. [18486]

Mr. Watts: Both the Secretary of State and the regulator have statutory powers to grant licences under the Railways Act 1993. Decisions on the licensing of further public sector operators of passenger rail services can most appropriately be taken by the Secretary of State.

Train Delays

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis compensation is paid to train operators for delays caused by engineering work not completed on schedule. [18485]

Mr. Watts: Train operators are paid compensation for overrunning engineering works through their track access performance regimes. These have been designed to ensure that, broadly, when action by Railtrack or its contractors causes disruption to services, passenger train operators should be able to recover from Railtrack liquidated damages reflecting a fair assessment of the economic losses which they have suffered.

Railtrack

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to write off the debts of Railtrack; and what are the amounts of money to be written off. [18759]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack has a mix of different debts. The majority—around £1.2 billion—is owed to the national loans fund and cannot pass into the private sector with Railtrack. It will therefore need to be replaced with appropriate direct borrowings. Section 106 of the Railways Act 1993 contains the power for doing this. Final decisions on Railtrack's debt and capital structure will be taken in due course.

TREASURY

Benefit Claims

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have made (i) one, (ii) two, (iii) three and (iv) four or more claims for unemployment-related benefits in the three year periods ending with each year from 1985 to 1995 in Great Britain; and what proportion each represents of those eligible to make such claims. [16251]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The table shows the numbers of men and women in Great Britain making one, two, three, or more than three claims for unemployment-related benefits in each three-year period since 1982. No information is available on the total number of people who might be eligible to make such claims but do not do so.

Number of claimants (000's)

	Number of claims in three-year period				
Period	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4+*	*Total*
Men					
1993–1995	2,596	1,120	468	327	4,512
1992–1994	2,787	1,213	498	339	4,838
1991–1993	2,926	1,249	512	345	5,033
1990–1992	2,829	1,177	480	310	4,796
1989–1991	2,450	955	367	221	3,994
1988–1990	2,117	777	293	185	3,371
1987–1989	2,162	789	298	195	3,444
1986–1988	2,365	932	381	274	3,953
1985–1987	1,666	582	235	180	2,663
1984–1986	2,669	988	413	318	4,388
1983–1985	2,592	962	403	309	4,268
Women					
1993–1995	1,506	494	170	93	2,263
1992–1994	1,585	517	182	98	2,383
1991–1993	1,649	534	187	99	2,468
1990–1992	1,604	506	168	87	2,365
1989–1991	1,420	412	128	59	2,019
1988–1990	1,356	362	104	51	1,873
1987–1989	1,460	406	128	64	2,058
1986–1988	1,660	524	179	105	2,466
1985–1987	1,000	333	126	78	1,537
1984–1986	1,721	552	200	124	2,596
1983–1985	1,679	541	196	121	2,537

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have made (i) one, (ii) two, (iii) three, (iv) four and (v) five or more claims for unemployment-related benefits in each standard region of (1) England, (2) Wales and (3) Scotland since April 1992; and what proportion each represents of those eligible to make such claims. [16252]

Mrs. Knight: The table shows the numbers of men and women in England, Wales and Scotland making one, two, three, four or more claims for unemployment-related benefits since April 1992. No information is available on the total number of people who might be eligible to make such claims but do not do so.

Number of claimants

(thousands)

	Number previous claims since April 1992					
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5+*	*Total*
Men						
England	2,459	1,145	533	243	211	4,591
Wales	131	68	34	16	14	263
Scotland	243	127	65	34	33	503
Great Britain	2,834	1,341	632	292	258	5,357
Women						
England	1,486	532	198	78	56	2,350
Wales	81	30	11	5	4	130
Scotland	163	59	25	11	9	267
Great Britain	1,730	621	234	94	69	2,747

Redundancies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the redundancy rate per 1,000 employees for each broad occupational group using the data from the spring labour force survey from 1989 to 1995. [17796]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information is given for people made redundant in the three months prior to their labour force survey interview in the spring quarters between 1991 and 1995. Data for 1989 and 1990 are not available on a comparable basis. The figures reflect the occupation in which people were last employed, or, for those people in paid employment, the occupation that they were in at the time of the interview.

Redundancy rates for 1,000 employees by occupation: Labour Force Survey, Great Britain

	Spring 1991	*Spring 1992*	*Spring 1993*	*Spring 1994*	*Spring 1995*
Managers and administrators	13.1	12.2	8.3	9.8	10.2
Professional	7.5	6.3	6.1	4.5	5.3
Associate professional and technical	13.2	10.6	8.5	5.7	8.1
Clerical and secretarial	14.3	14.7	9.9	7.8	10.6
Craft and Related	32.7	27.9	20.7	18.2	15.7
Personal and protective	9.7	6.9	6.9	5.8	6.3
Sales	16.6	14.8	15.5	10	13.8
Plant and machine operatives	30.1	22.8	22.7	16.1	12.8
Other	19.5	16.4	14.6	9.2	10.4

Leisure Industry (Seasonal Workers)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many seasonal workers are employed in the United Kingdom leisure and entertainment industry in the most recent year for which figures are available. [17789]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested is provided in the table.

Seasonal employment by industry in Great Britain (thousands)[1]

Standard industrial classification	*Q2 94*	*Q3 94*	*Q4 94*	*Q1 95*	*Q2 95*
Hotels and restaurants	50	33	14	22	49
Recreational, cultural and sporting activities	31	15	[1]—	10	31

Seasonal employment by industry in Great Britain (thousands)[1]

Standard industrial classification	*Q2 94*	*Q3 94*	*Q4 94*	*Q1 95*	*Q2 95*
Travel agencies, tour operators	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Total[2]	83	51	20	33	83

[1] Unadjusted.
[2] Due to rounding may not equal sum of component industries.
[3] Denotes reliable estimate not available.
Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Unemployment

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current level of unemployment *(a)* in the Greater London area and *(b)* in other regions in the United Kingdom. [17727]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Nomis gives information on claimant unemployment and the labour force survey quarterly bulletin gives information on ILO unemployment. Both are available from the House of Commons Library.

Share Dividends

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of change in the average percentage dividends paid by industrial and commercial companies to their shareholders in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995. [17423]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information on payments of dividends by industrial and commercial companies are published in the Central Statistical Office's "First Release—Quarterly National Accounts", and in the CSO publications, "UK Economic Accounts" and "Financial Statistics". These are available from the Library of the House. The latest seasonally adjusted data from 1994 and 1995 for industrial and commercial companies' dividends payments in pounds million, and dividends payments as a percentage of industrial and commercial companies gross trading profits, including stock appreciation, are as follows:

	Dividends payments (excluding payments to overseas parents)	*As a percentage of industrial and commercial companies' gross trading profits*
1994 Q1	4,771	20.7
1994 Q2	5,801	23.2
1994 Q3	5,926	22.9
1994 Q4	6,177	22.6
1995 Q1	6,647	25.0
1995 Q2	6,140	22.1
1995 Q3	6,612	24,3

Data for 1995 Q4 will be published on 26 March 1996.

Additionally, table 7.1G of the CSO publication "Financial Statistics" contains dividend yields.

Devaluation

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact of a devaluation of the French franc equivalent to the devaluation of the pound sterling since 1992 on British trade with France. [17961]

Mrs. Angela Knight: No estimate has been made of the impact of such a devaluation of the French franc on British trade with France.

However, British trade with France depends on a wide range of factors, of which the exchange rate is only one, and it is difficult to disentangle the various influences. In any case, without knowing the circumstances surrounding a devaluation of the French franc, it would be impossible to estimate its likely effects.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact of a devaluation of the German mark equivalent to the devaluation of the pound sterling since 1992 on British trade with Germany. [17960]

Mrs. Knight: No estimate has been made of the impact of such a devaluation of the German mark on British trade with Germany.

However, British trade with Germany depends on a wide range of factors, of which the exchange rate is only one, and it is difficult to disentangle the various influences. In any case, without knowing the circumstances surrounding a devaluation of the German mark, it would be impossible to estimate its likely effects.

Forte (Granada Takeover)

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the cost to the Exchequer resulting from the tax credit claimed by gross funds on the special dividend in the Granada takeover offer for Forte. [18346]

Mr. Jack: I am unable to comment on the tax affairs of particular taxpayers.

Tax Reliefs

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the reasons for the rules in respect of tax relief which apply to subscriptions to *(a)* the Royal College of Nursing and *(b)* Unison; and what plans he has to standardise the rules. [17890]

Mr. Jack: Tax relief may be given under section 201 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 for subscriptions paid by employees to approved bodies. A body may be approved by the board of Inland Revenue if it meets the conditions laid down in the Act. The same conditions apply to all bodies. Whether a particular body meets the conditions is a matter between it and the Inland Revenue.

Working Hours

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the average working hours per week of those in full-time employment in each of the last 15 years. [18506]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The table following gives the information available from the labour force survey.

Total average usual weekly hours worked by those in full-time employment (Great Britain, not seasonably adjusted)

	Hours worked
Spring 1984	44.8
Spring 1985	44.2
Spring 1986	44.5
Spring 1987	44.7
Spring 1988	44.9
Spring 1989	44.9
Spring 1990	44.9
Spring 1991	44.7
Spring 1992	44.5
Spring 1993	44.6
Spring 1994	44.8
Spring 1995	44.9

Local Government Finance

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he plans to make to the quotas for lending to local authorities by the Public Works Loan Board. [19207]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The public works loan commissioners have issued a circular today notifying local authorities that there will be no change in the formula for calculating quotas for 1996–97.

Copies of the circular have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Regulatory Bodies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each regulatory body for which he is responsible indicating for each the percentage of business people on the board. [15743]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 20 February 1996]:* The percentage of business people on the board of each regulatory body is as follows:

Public Works Loan Board—58 per cent.

Securities and Investment Board—66 per cent.

VAT and duties tribunals—not known.

Regulatory bodies have been defined for this purpose as those which either make, or apply, regulations. Business people have been taken to include all those working, or having previously worked, in the private sector, including those holding directorships, excluding non-executive directorships. The numbers of business people on the boards of the VAT and duties tribunals is not known, and the information could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he first consulted other Cabinet Ministers about the contents of the report of the Scott inquiry; and where and when such discussions took place and with whom. [16513]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* It is not the practice to give details of ministerial meetings.

Temporary Employment Contracts

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has as to the number of people in the United Kingdom currently working under temporary employment contracts; how many have been supplied by employment agencies; and how many have been supplied by such agencies under contracts for service. [17352]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* The latest available information from the labour force survey shows that in summer—June to August—1995, there were 1,739,000 temporary employees in the United Kingdom. Of these, 182,000 said that they were agency temping. No information is available about the number of temporary employees supplied by employment agencies under contracts of service.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish *(a)* the recommendations made by the Council of Ministers to the United Kingdom, arising from article 23 of the Single European Act, with reference to economic and monetary union and *(b)* the Government's response. [17479]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 28 February 1996]:* Article 23 of the Single European Act, which inserted articles 130a to 130e on economic and social cohesion into the EEC treaty, does not provide for any recommendations relating to economic and monetary union.

Single European Currency

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *670*, when he expects to be able to make a precise judgment on the impact of a single European currency on the United Kingdom economy. [1671]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 28 February 1996]:* The United Kingdom will agree to take part in a single currency only if it is in our national interest to do so, given the circumstances at the time. A full assessment will be carried out nearer the time, before the decision is made.

Manufacturing (Earnings)

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are average earnings in manufacturing industry. [17361]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 28 February 1996]:* Underlying average earnings growth in the manufacturing sector was 4 per cent. in December 1995. This is the lowest rate since the series began in 1980.

Transfers of Iraqi Funds

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what inquiries are being conducted into transfers of Iraqi funds from Geneva to London. [17857]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 28 February 1996]:* None. We have no knowledge of any such transfers in breach of United Nations sanctions against

Iraq being made in the first instance, it would be for the Swiss authorities to investigate, as appropriate, any transfers suspected of involving a breach of sanctions.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which serving civil servants in his Department are presently directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18151]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* This information is not collected centrally. Staff are required only to inform their line manager in writing of any relevant private financial interest where this might give rise to a conflict of interest with their official dealings in their current post. These records are held by the relevant team leader while the individual is in that post. No central record is held.

Tax Shortfall

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what shortfall he currently estimates in the level of tax collected by the Inland Revenue set against his Budget forecast. [18316]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* Outturn for the year to date is published in "Financial Statistics" monthly and provisional outturn will appear in the May 1996 edition. Final outturn for 1995–96 will be published in the board of Inland Revenue report late in the year.

The forecast of Inland Revenue receipts for future years will be next updated in the summer economic forecast.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Isle of Wight (Expenditure)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total expenditure by her Department on the Isle of Wight in 1994–95 broken down by category. [16774]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is not available in the form requested. The Department for Education and Employment was created in July 1995. The information given relates to those functions retained by this Department after that date.

Expenditure information on schools is not held in the form requested.

The department does not hold information in such detail for either further or higher education. This should be obtainable from the Further Education Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council, which are responsible for the funding of further and higher institutions respectively.

Expenditure in 1994–95 by the Employment Service was £1.8 million. Expenditure by the Isle of Wight training and enterprise council was £5 million.

Student Loans (Wales)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students in Wales were granted student loans in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [17782]

Mr. Forth: In the academic year 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available, the number of loans taken out by students studying in Wales was 26,500. Corresponding figures for the academic years 1992–93 and 1993–94 were 15,900 and 20,500 respectively.

Student Awards (Mid Glamorgan)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students of higher education received *(a)* mandatory awards and *(b)* discretionary awards from Mid Glamorgan county council in (i) 1995, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1991; and if she will make a statement. [17559]

Mr. Forth: In the academic year 1993–94, the latest year for which data are available, Mid Glamorgan local education authority made 6,620 new and continuing mandatory awards and 50 discretionary awards to higher education students. Corresponding figures for the academic year 1991–92 were 5,120 mandatory awards and 170 discretionary awards.

Information Technology

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to assess specific skills shortages in information technology. [16407]

Mr. Paice: The annual skill needs in Britain survey, commissioned by the Department, collects information on the number of hard-to-fill vacancies across all occupations and on employers' views on the types of skills among their existing employees that need improving. The information technology industrial training organisation regularly carries out surveys of more specific skill shortages in information technology.

Overseas Football Players

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on recent meetings between representatives of professional soccer authorities and members of his Department in respect of the granting of work permits to overseas soccer players wishing to play in the United Kingdom. [18175]

Mrs. Gillan: There has been a useful first meeting with representatives of the Football Association, Premier League, Football League and the Professional Footballers Association. Further meetings are to be held with the football bodies and it is hoped to complete the found of discussions shortly.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to meet authorities involved in professional soccer to discuss the issuing of work permits to overseas footballers seeking to play in Britain; and if she will make a statement. [18211]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department is currently holding meetings with the representative bodies of professional football to discuss the criteria applying to the transfer between clubs of players holding work permits. I shall be announcing final decisions in outstanding cases shortly.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects a work permit to be issued to Mr. Marc Hottiger to allow him to play professional soccer in the United Kingdom. [18212]

Mrs. Gillan: Mr. Hottiger already holds a work permit to play professional football for Newcastle United. An application by Everton to employ Mr. Hottiger is under consideration and I hope to make a decision on this case shortly.

Under-fives Education

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the number and percentage of three and four-year-olds attending nursery and primary schools in *(a)* the Greater Manchester area and *(b)* in the borough of Rochdale in each of the last five years. [18259]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the table:

Pupils under five years of age on 1 January in maintained nursery and primary schools in Greater Manchester metropolitan district (1) 1991–1995

Position in January each year

	Greater Manchester		*Rochdale*	
Year	*Pupils*	*Pupils as a percentage of the population*[2]	*Pupils*	*Pupils as a percentage of the population*[2]
1991	47,770	67	4,257	61
1992	49,289	68	4,133	64
1993	50,781	69	4,140	66
1994	51,006	68	4,034	64
1995	52,313	69	3,968	65

[1] Includes the local education authority areas of Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan.

[2] Number of pupils under 5 years of age expressed as a percentage of the estimated population aged 3 and 4 at 31 December in the previous year.

Youth Training

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures exist to ensure that the maximum hours of work for young people on youth training schemes are not exceeded. [18436]

Mr. Paice: The contract which the Department has with training and enterprise councils, who are responsible for administering Government training programmes, requires that the maximum weekly attendance for a non-employed trainee shall be 40 hours. TECs are required to ensure that there is a regular review of training arrangements with each individual trainee. There are no other restrictions on the maximum number of hours of work for young people on youth training schemes.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the maximum hours of work for young people on youth training schemes involving agricultural work. [18435]

Mr. Paice: The contract that the Department has with training and enterprise councils, who are responsible for administering Government training programmes, requires that the maximum weekly attendance for a non-employed trainee shall be 40 hours, excluding one meal break per day. There are no other restrictions on the maximum number of hours of work for young people on youth training schemes.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the reserves held by each training and enterprise council in 1994–95. [18493]

Mr. Paice: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) on 9 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *381–82*. This shows a list of training and enterprise councils and their accumulated reserves, as shown in their annual statutory audited accounts, at the end of the financial year 1994–95.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total expenditure by her Department in *(a)* Waveney, *(b)* Suffolk and *(c)* Norfolk in 1994–95; what it will be in 1995–96, broken down by category; and if she will make a statement. [17767]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is not available in the form requested. The Department for Education and Employment was created in July 1995. The information relates to those functions retained by this Department after that date.

Expenditure information on schools is not held centrally in the form requested.

The Department does not hold information in such detail for either further or higher education. This should be obtainable from the Further Education Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council, which are responsible for the funding of further and higher institutions respectively.

Expenditure by the Employment Service

£ million

	1994–95 outturn	*1995–96 provision*
Suffolk	4.0	3.6
Norfolk including Waveney	8.3	9.4

Expenditure by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs):-

	1994–95 outturn	*1995–96 provision*
Suffolk TEC	12.9	13.9
Norfolk and Waveney TEC	19.4	19.8

After-school Places

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many after-school places were provided in England for each year since 1990. [18246]

Mrs. Gillan: The out-of-school child care initiative was introduced in April 1993. In the financial year 1993–94, 4,000 places were created, in 1994–95 22,000 places were created and in 1995–96, 27,000 places had been created by January 1996. The total created since the initiative began is 53,000.

Experimental Nuclear Reactor (Imperial College)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provisions have been made for the decommissioning of the experimental nuclear reactor at Imperial college. [18067]

Mr. Forth: No provisions have been made for the decommissioning of this reactor. If Imperial college did decide to decommission a reactor which is central to its research activity, it would be for the college to make the necessary provisions.

European Social Fund

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list funding contributions *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of total funding from the European social fund to each training and enterprise council in England and Wales for the (i) youth training, (ii) youth credits, (iii) modern apprenticeships and (iv) training for work programmes. [18758]

Mr. Forth: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what circumstances the Employment Service will be able to vary the signing on time of a claimant in receipt of jobseeker's allowance so that such a claimant is able to attend a part-time training or education course. [18756]

Mr. Forth: The Employment Service will normally make arrangements so that a person in receipt of jobseeker's allowance who is a part-time student can attend the local office at a time which does not conflict with the hours of the course. Jobseekers should nevertheless be willing and able to arrange the hours of courses of part-time study in order to take up full-time employment at times falling within their pattern of availability.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if existing claimants will be required to complete a jobsearch plan and jobseeker's agreement when jobseeeker's allowance is introduced. [18748]

Mr. Forth: Existing unemployed claimants is already in receipt of unemployment benefit or income support when JSA is introduced in October 1996 will be treated as having made a jobseeker's agreement until, at the first suitable opportunity, an actual agreement is made or until their claim is terminated, whichever is the earlier.

In drawing up the agreement with existing claimants, Employment Service staff will assess whether the information already provided by the client for their claim to unemployment benefit or income support is sufficient for completing an agreement. Where the information is not sufficient or where the adviser and jobseeeker are not able to agree an agreement—for example because of a dispute about a pattern of availability—ES staff will be advised to ask the jobseeker to complete a "Helping You Back to Work" form, previously referred to as the jobsearch plan.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) in what circumstances a claimant in receipt of jobseekers' allowance participating in a part-time education or training course will not be required to attend a compulsory restart, workwise worklink course or jobplan workshop; and what structures will be in place to enable such claimants to maintain their course place; [18750]

(2) in what circumstances an unemployed person participating in a part-time education or training course will not be directed to attend a Government employment or training programme under the jobseeker's direction; and what facilities or arrangements will apply to those who are so directed to maintain part-time study. [18753]

Mr. Forth: The first priority of people claiming jobseeker's allowance must be to return to work. Jobseekers who are claiming JSA and studying part time will continue to be required to attend mandatory Employment Service programmes, which are designed to help them back to work. In addition, they may be given a jobseeker's direction to attend a Government employment or training programme with a view to assisting them to find employment or improving their prospects of being employed. It will be for an independent adjudication officer to decide whether such a direction was reasonable in the jobseeker's circumstances. No sanction will be imposed if a jobseeker shows good cause for refusing or failing to attend a mandatory programme or to carry out a jobseeker's direction.

Where possible, the Employment Service will seek to make arrangements which are reasonable in view of the jobseeker's circumstances and study pattern. This may involve rescheduling a stage of the programme to accommodate their study commitments, or by trying to arrange attendance during college holidays. Courses of study are also becoming more flexible, and where necessary jobseekers will be expected to re-arrange the hours they study so that they can attend the programme.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what circumstances participation in a part-time education or training course will count as one of the job seeking steps necessary to satisfy the actively seeking work condition of the jobseeker's allowance. [18754]

Mr. Forth: The JSA regulations set out a non-exhaustive list of steps that it is reasonable for a

jobseeker to be expected to have to take actively to seek employment. Participation in a part-time education or training course is not included in that list. However, any time during which a person was participating as a part-time student in an employment-related course, as defined in the regulations, is included in the regulations in a non-exhaustive list of circumstances that shall be taken into account in determining whether a person has taken sufficient steps to meet the entitlement condition.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if a claimant will be able to study part-time and claim jobseeker's allowance in circumstances where it is not possible for him to rearrange course times in order to take up employment at times falling within his pattern of availability and he undertakes to cease the course immediately suitable employment becomes available. [18757]

Mr. Forth: Jobseekers who claim jobseeker's allowance will be able to study part-time so long as they remain available for and actively seeking employment. They do not have to re-arrange their course but they should be prepared to leave their course to take a job if one becomes available.

There will also be an additional concession for certain jobseekers—broadly those who have been unemployed for three months or more, where no aspect of their study will be taken into account when deciding whether they are available for work if they are willing and able to rearrange their course to take a job in the hours that they have agreed they will be available for work in their jobseeker's agreement. If it is not possible for jobseekers to rearrange their course then this concession will not apply and they will be subject to the same rules as other jobseekers who study part time.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the maximum number of hours that unemployed people in receipt of jobseeker's allowance will be able to spend on training and education courses exclusively funded by the European social fund. [18755]

Mr. Forth: People receiving jobseeker's allowance will be able to study part time so long as they remain available for and actively seeking employment.

No courses are exclusively funded by the European social fund. It part funds courses jointly with a wide range of organisations. Under JSA, if a course is part funded by the Further Education Funding Councils for England and Wales and by the ESF it will be regarded as part time so long as it is of 16 or fewer guided learning hours a week. There will be similar arrangements for further education courses in Scotland.

There will be no change to the rules for courses part funded by the ESF and any other organisation. As now, a decision will be made about whether the course is full or part time based on all the information available, including any provided by the course provider.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements will be introduced for reviews by Employment Service staff of jobseeker's agreements completed by postal claimants. [18749]

Mr. Forth: Most jobseekers will be required to attend a jobcentre to make a claim for a jobseeker's allowance and to sign a jobseeker's agreement. Thereafter they will be required to attend a jobcentre every fortnight to sign a declaration that they have been available for employment, have been actively seeking employment and that their circumstances have not changed. Some jobseekers, as now, will not be required to attend fortnightly but will be able to provide such a signed declaration by post. Postal signers will be seen by an Employment Service adviser every 13 weeks. At that time the employment adviser and jobseeker will review the jobseeker's circumstances and determine whether the jobseeker's agreement that is in effect should be varied.

In certain circumstances some jobseekers will be able to make a claim for a jobseeker's allowance by post. They will be treated as having made a jobseeker's agreement until they have an interview with an employment adviser to draw up an agreement.

Grant-maintained Schools (Funding)

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when grant-maintained schools were transferred from the public sector to the private sector in respect of their treatment over capital expenditure. [18834]

Mrs. Gillan: Grant-maintained schools have always been considered to be private sector institutions.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what undertakings she has given to grant-maintained school governors in respect of increasing the annual maintenance grant to cover the cost of any private sector loans secured by grant-maintained schools. [18835]

Mr. Robin Squire: None. Except in areas where the common funding formula is in operation, annual maintenance grant for grant-maintained schools will continue to be calculated with reference to the local management of schools scheme of the local education authority in which the school is situated. In CFF areas, AMG is derived from the standard spending assessment for education for the authority in which the schools are situated.

Jobfinder's Grant

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many applications for a jobfinder's grant have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* not approved; and what were the gross weekly wages of those approved in gradations of £10 for (i) each standard region and (ii) Great Britain. [18746]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 4 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the Jobfinder's Grant.

I attach a table (Table 1) showing how many Jobfinder's Grants have been applied for and have been awarded nationally and by Employment Service region since the programme was introduced on 18 April (22 May in Yorkshire and Humberside region, where a more flexible variant to the programme is being piloted) up to 2 February 1996, which is the latest date for which figures are available.

I also attach a table (Table 2) showing the latest information about the gross weekly wage level of grant recipients.

I hope this is helpful.

Table 1: Jobfinder's Grant

	Grants applied for[1]	*Grants awarded*[1]
London and South East	2,593	1,483
South West	1,199	730
Wales	939	585
West Midlands	2,325	1,448
North West	2,238	1,389
Scotland	1,344	669
Northern	1,268	837
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,515	1,159
East Midlands and Eastern	2,579	1,491
National total	16,000	9,791

[1] To 2 February.

Table 2: Jobfinder's Grant

Wage	*London and South-east*	*South-west*	*Wales*	*West Midlands*	*North-west*	*Scotland*	*Northern*	*Yorkshire and Humberside*	*East Midlands*	*National total*
£10-19	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
£20-29	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
£30-39	4	1	0	0	1	0	1	3	3	13
£40-49	7	2	5	1	5	1	2	24	8	55
£50-59	9	9	12	11	20	0	10	46	22	139
£60-69	25	11	13	23	31	4	11	28	22	168
£70-79	25	14	7	21	27	5	28	26	31	184
£80-89	33	23	21	45	43	9	50	25	40	289
£90-99	54	45	29	36	71	29	44	21	54	383
£100-109	105	56	49	95	95	41	76	44	133	694
£110-119	90	34	38	89	80	73	64	29	95	592
£120-129	196	115	109	266	262	148	119	96	274	1,585
£130-139	192	86	62	178	196	75	113	50	186	1,138
£140-149	277	125	121	259	243	91	82	47	292	1,537
£150-159	90	24	21	60	41	23	14	54	85	412
£160-169	1	0	1	3	2	4	1	53	2	67
£170-179	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	19	0	24
£180-189	2	1	0	2	1	0	0	23	2	31
£190-199	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7
£200-209	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	36	0	39
£210-219	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10
£220-229	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	8
£230-239	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	6
£240-249	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7
£250-259	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	5
£260-269	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
£270-279	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
£280-289	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
£290-299	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
£300+	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	1,115	549	488	1,091	1,119	505	616	668	1,250	7,401

1. The source of this information is a database held by the company contracted to evaluate the Jobfinder's Grant, on the basis of 7,401 grant recipients inputted to the database up to the end of December 1995.
2. In Yorkshire and Humberside variations on the national scheme are being piloted, allowing part-time jobs and jobs paying up to £250 a week to qualify for the award of a grant.

School Premises Regulations

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of the last quinquennial review of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. [18831]

Mrs. Gillan: The regulations were reviewed as part of the normal work of the Department and it would not be possible to separate out the cost of the work involved.

Travel to Interviews Scheme

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what have been *(a)* the number of applications received, *(b)* the number approved, *(c)* the number not approved, *(d)* the average level of each award and *(e)* the total expenditure in each year of operation of the travel to interviews scheme; and what is the projected expenditure and number of awards in 1996–97 shown by (i) standard region and (ii) in total. [18747]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 4 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on the Travel to Interview Scheme (TIS).

The information you requested is as follows:—

Travel to Interview Scheme
(numbers assisted and associated costs)

Year	Number of applications	Number helped	Number rejected	Total cost £	Average cost £
1986–87	28,938	21,765	7,173	500,000	22.97
1987–88	45,785	34,136	11,649	946,000	27.72
1988–89	41,116	32,833	8,823	920,000	28.02
1989–90	32,953	25,736	7,217	682,000	26.50
1990–91	29,178	22,112	7,066	500,000	22.61
1991–92	41,676	31,004	10,672	934,000	30.10
1992–93	59,073	45,240	13,833	1,520,000	32.85
1993–94	65,598	50,373	15,288	1,790,000	35.53
1994–95	66,716	51,140	15,576	1,808,000	35.35
1995–96	[1]43,310	[1]33,580	[1]9,730	[1]1,315,000	39.16

[1] Figures up to end December 1995—year end statistics unavailable until mid-April 1996.

The following chart gives the anticipated figures and spend for the regions for 1996–97. Unlike some other programmes, TIS has to respond to demand. The provision and numbers we expect to help are, therefore, based on best estimates and may fluctuate according to demand and variations in transport costs.

Region	Allocation	Number helped
East Midlands	173,907	4,241
London and South East	261,630	6,381
North West	207,765	5,067
Northern	152,361	3,716
Scotland	173,907	4,241
South West	195,453	4,767
Wales	107,730	2,627
West Midlands	93,879	2,289
Yorkshire and Humberside	172,368	4,204
Total	1,539,000	37,533

I hope this is helpful.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which serving civil servants in her Department are currently directors of companies; and if she will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18135]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* I am not aware that there are any serving civil servants in the Department currently holding or receiving remuneration in respect of directorships for either developmental or ex-officio purposes. Details of privately held directorships are not held centrally by the Department.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the total number and *(b)* the total value of discretionary awards to (i) students aged 16 to 18 years, and (ii) students aged 19 years and over in the last year for which figures are available. [18751]

Mr. Forth: The available information for the academic year 1993–94, the latest for which data are available, is given in the table:

Discretionary Awards in England and Wales
Academic Year 1993–94

	Number of awards (000s)	Total expenditure (£ million)
All discretionary awards of which:	222.2	184.1
Further education students aged 16-18	124.6	51.9
Further education students aged 19 and over	82.3	90.6
Higher education	15.4	41.6

Source:
F503G

Constituent parts may not add to totals due to roundings.
Age of student at the beginning of the academic year.
Age breakdown not available.

Special Educational Needs Tribunal

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the present membership of the special educational needs tribunal panel, indicating *(a)* the experience and *(b)* the qualifications on which they were selected for appointment. [17332]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 26 February 1996]:* The special educational needs tribunal has 32 legally qualified chairmen and 89 lay members. Their names are listed in appendix 3 of the president's annual report, a copy of which is in the Library.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State appoints lay members of the SEN tribunal. Lay members are required to have knowledge and experience at a strategic or operational level of either local government or special educational needs. The chairmen of the tribunal are required to have a seven-year legal qualification and are appointed by my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor.

HOME DEPARTMENT

EDS Ltd.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those contracts his Department currently holds with EDS indicating for each the *(a)* date of inception, *(b)* value and *(c)* duration. [17443]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office has one contract with EDS which began in 1994. It is currently valid for a period of 12 months. The annual value of the contract is below £50,000 per annum.

Scott Inquiry

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent to which the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill will meet the recommendations made by Sir Richard Scott in paragraph K5.1. [17234]

Mr. Howard: I am considering the implications of these recommendations for the Bill. I hope to be able to announce my conclusions in time for changes to be made to the Bill, if any changes appear to be necessary.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he had with the Secretary to the Cabinet concerning the Government's response to the Scott inquiry; and where and when such consultations took place. [16602]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* Successive Governments have not disclosed the nature of the specific sources of the advice they receive from the civil service.

Director General of the Prison Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what salary plus bonus is being offered for the position of Director General of the Prison Service. [17703]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to him on 27 February, *Official Report*, column *417*.

Coroners

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the standard method of compiling verbatim transcripts in coroners courts; and what is the fee to bereaved relatives for a full transcript. [18194]

Mr. Sackville: Coroners are required, under the Coroners' Rules 1984, to take notes of evidence at the inquest. In many instances a tape-recording of the proceedings is taken. The fee for a transcript depends on the length of the document and is determined in accordance with the fees set out in the Coroners' Records (Fees for Copies) Rules 1982, as amended.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home department (1) how many cases were referred back by coroners to the Crown Prosecution service or police for further investigation or consideration of a more serious charge in each of the last 10 years; [18189]

(2) how many inquests into road deaths in the last year had to be adjourned because the driver responsible for the death did not attend; how many inquests went ahead without the driver and at how many inquests the drivers were allowed to remain silent; [18192]

(3) how many inquests into road deaths have been held after summary charges have been made; [18184]

(4) how many inquests into road deaths have been held with juries, under section 8(3) (d) of the Coroners Act 1988; [18183]

(5) how many inquests into road deaths were held *(a)* after six months and *(b)* after one year from the date of death in each of the last 10 years; [18190]

(6) what were the percentages of *(a)* accidental death, *(b)* unlawful killing and *(c)* open verdicts in respect of road deaths in each of the last 10 years. [18188]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inquests were reconvened after a guilty plea in the crown court in the past 10 years; how many were not reconvened; and what were the reasons for not reconvening inquests. [18186]

Mr. Sackville: Information regarding the number of adjourned inquests which were resumed, or not resumed, is not held centrally. On conclusion of the relevant criminal proceedings, or beforehand, if notified by the Director of Public Prosecutions that it is open to him to do so, a coroner may resume an adjourned inquest when, in his opinion, there is sufficient cause to do so.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the consultative procedure in respect of which statistics relating to inquests should be published by his office; and how frequently the types of statistics published are reviewed. [18185]

Mr. Sackville: Any proposals for changes or additions would first be discussed with senior coroners. The collection of statistics is reviewed each year.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to which documents bereaved families are entitled before an inquest to enable them or their legal representatives to ask pertinent questions relating to the death. [18193]

Mr. Sackville: There is no general procedure in coroners' courts for documents to be released to interested persons in advance of the inquest.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training coroners receive in respect of developments in road safety. [18195]

Mr. Sackville: The Home Office provides regular training courses for coroners, dealing with a range of issues relevant to the discharge of their duties. From time to time these courses can be expected to include matters concerning road deaths.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recommendations for action by city or county councils have been issued by coroners in the last 10 years; and what steps have been taken to ensure these recommendations were carried out. [18191]

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not held centrally. It is for the person or authority to whom the coroner reports the matter to consider what action should be taken.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaints procedures applies in relation to coroners failing to act in accordance with procedures laid down in the Coroners Act 1988; and which Home Office department carries out inquiries into complaints. [18187]

Mr. Sackville: Coroner's decisions or their conduct of proceedings may be challenged in the High Court by means of a statutory procedure or judicial review. Complaints concerning a coroner's non-judicial conduct may be referred to the Home Office for inquiry into the matter on a non-statutory basis. If the investigation reveals a clear instance of grounds for dismissal, the matter will be referred to the Lord Chancellor's Department since my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor alone has the power to dismiss a coroner from office for inability or misbehaviour in the discharge of his duties.

Entry Permission

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when Mr. Namir I. D. Al-Nainir of 2 Stratford place, London, an Iraqi citizen *(a)* entered and *(b)* left the United Kingdom; what were the nature and terms of his entry permission; and if deportation proceedings were made against him; [17926]

(2) when Dr. Fadel Kadhum of 2 Stratford place, London, *(a)* entered and *(b)* left the United Kingdom; what were the nature and terms of his entry permission; and if deportation proceedings were made against him. [17927]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is not normal Home Office policy to disclose information relating to individual foreign nationals to third parties, unless the individuals concerned or their representatives choose to make details public themselves. However, if the hon. Member wishes to write to me explaining his interest in these two persons I will give the matter further consideration.

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons in England and Wales have a race relations committee. [18085]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about race relation committees in prisons.

128 establishments in England and Wales have Race Relations Management Teams. Some of these teams each cover two establishments, and all establishments in England and Wales are covered by a Race Relations Team.

Prison Ombudsman

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases have been referred to the prison ombudsman since his appointment. [18083]

Miss Widdecombe: The prison ombudsman had received 2,327 letters of complaint by 27 February 1996, of which 620 were eligible for investigation by his office; the eligibility of a further 121 was being considered. Investigations into 463 complaints have now been completed and the complaint upheld on 201 occasions. In a further 42 cases the complaint was resolved or withdrawn during the course of the investigation.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure by his Department in *(a)* Waveney and *(b)* Suffolk in 1994–95; what it will be in 1995–96, broken down by category; and if he will make a statement. [17842]

Mr. Howard: The table lists Home Office expenditure in Suffolk in 1994–95 and 1995–96.

£000

	1994–95	*[1]1995–96*
Police grants to county council and police authority	29,915	29,886
Probation grants to county council	3,040	3,210
Civil defence grants to county council and police authority	230	215
Voluntary Services	3	1
Crime Prevention Grants	100	—
Section 11 (ethnic minorities) grants to county council	266	216
Immigration Service	460	502
Prison Service	29,508	28,609
Total	63,522	62,639

[1] Estimated.

Home Office grants to the county council and police authority are generally not earmarked for particular areas of the county. Of the totals above, only Prison Service expenditure of £8,193,000 (1994–95) and £8,130,000 (1995–96) can be identified as spent specifically in Waveney.

Peter Samuel Cook

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recommendations have been made by the Parole Board in respect of Peter Samuel Cook. [17919]

Miss Widdecombe: A discretionary lifer panel of the Parole Board considered Mr. Cook's case on 6 June 1995. The panel recommended that he should be transferred to a category D—open—prison. This recommendation has been accepted and Mr. Cook is now waiting to be transferred.

Mrs. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Peter Samuel Cook has received *(a)* treatment and *(b)* therapy while he has been in prison. [17921]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mrs. Anne Campbell, dated 4 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about Mr. Peter Samuel Cook.

Throughout Mr. Cook's sentence the Prison Service has sought to ensure, as far as possible, that appropriate therapy and treatment has been made available to him.

Rapists

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* treatments and

(b) therapies are made available to convicted rapists whilst they are in prison. [17920]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mrs. Anne Campbell, dated 4 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about treatments and therapies available to convicted rapists.

Since 1992 the Prison Service has been running a cognitive behavioural treatment programme for sex offenders, which is open to both rapists and child abusers. The programme is run in 22 prisons which provide treatment for about 500 prisoners a year.

Open Prison Transfers

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if a risk assessment is carried out on all prisoners prior to their transfer to open prisons in respect of their contact with the local residential population. [17922]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Anne Campbell, dated 4 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director general from the office, to reply to your recent Question about risk assessment on all prisoners prior to their transfer to open prisons in respect of their contact with the local residential population.

The arrangements for temporary release on licence, including the criteria for eligibility and risk assessment, are set out in Instruction to Governors 36/1995 copies of which are available in the Library.

Life sentence prisoners must be recommended by the Parole Board and approved by Ministers before they are allocated to open prisons. A full risk assessment is undertaken before life sentence prisoners are approved for release on temporary licence from open prisons into the community.

Prisoners serving determinate sentences who are eligible for release on temporary licence must also satisfy a mandatory risk assessment.

Terrorist Incidents

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates terrorist incidents ascribed to the IRA have taken place on the British mainland for each year since 1980. [18744]

Mr. Howard: The information available relates to acts of terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland as defined in section 14 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. Until 1989 only those incidents which caused death or injury were recorded.

Date	*Location*	*Death/injuries*
2 December 1980	Princess Louise Regiment Territorial Army Centre, Hammersmith Road, London W6	Device exploded injuring five people
10 October 1981	Ebury Bridge Road, London SW1	Device exploded killing two people and injuring 39
17 October 1981	London SE21	One person injured in an explosion
26 October 1981	Wimpy Bar, Oxford Street, London W1	One person killed in an explosion
23 November 1981	Royal Artillery HQ, Government House, Woolwich New Road, London SE18	Device exploded injuring two people
20 July 1982	South Carriage Road, Hyde Park, London W1	Device exploded killing four people and injuring 28
	Regents Park, London NW1	Device exploded killing seven people and injuring 31
10 December 1983	Royal Artillery Barracks, Repository Road, London SE18	Device exploded injuring three people
17 December 1983	Outside Harrods, Knightsbridge, London SW3	Six people were killed and 91 injured in an explosion
25 December 1983	Orchard Street, London W1	Device exploded injuring two people
12 October 1984	Grand Hotel, Brighton, Sussex	Device exploded during the Conservative Party Conference killing five people and injuring 30 others
15/16 August 1987	Various	Postal devices were sent to six senior civil servants. No injuries
1 August 1988	Inglis Barracks, London SW7	Device exploded killing one person and injuring eight others
20 February 1989	Ternhill Barracks, Shropshire	One person injured in an explosion
22 September 1989	Royal Marines School of Music, North Barracks, Deal, Kent	Device exploded killing 11 and injuring 21 others
15 November 1989	Kensington	Device discovered and defused. No injuries
18 November 1989	Married Quarters, Colchester	Device attached to car exploded injuring two people
16 January 1990	Army HQ, SE District, Aldershot	Postal device discovered and defused—No injuries
20 February 1990	Combined Services Recruitment Centre, Rutland Street, Leicester	Device attached to a vehicle exploded nearby injuring two people
25 February 1990	Army Recruiting Office, New Road, Halifax	Device exploded. No injuries
14 May 1990	Service Education Centre, Eltham, S London SE9	Device exploded injuring five people
16 May 1990	Army Recruiting Centre, Wembley, Middlesex	Device exploded killing one person and injuring four others
1 June 1990	Lichfield Railway Station, Staffordshire	One person was killed and two others injured in a shooting incident

Date	Location	Death/injuries
9 June 1990	Honourable Artillery HQ, City Road, London EC1	19 people were injured in an explosion
12 June 1990	Hampshire	Device discovered and defused. No injuries
21 June 1990	RAF Stanmore Park, Uxbridge	Device exploded. No injuries
25 June 1990	Carlton Club, St. James, London SW1	Bomb exploded injuring 20 people
6 July 1990	The Strand, London WC2	Small device exploded in a litter bin. No injuries
20 July 1990	Stock Exchange, London EC1	Device exploded—no injuries
30 July 1990	Pevensey	Ian Gow MP was killed when a device exploded under his car
6 August 1990	London NW8	Device discovered and defused at the former home of Lord Armstrong. No injuries
13 August 1990	Didcot	Device discovered and defused at the home of Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley. No injuries
10 September 1990	Army and Navy Recruiting Office, Derby	Bomb exploded—no injuries
17 September 1990	Army Information Centre, Finchley, London	Army colour sergeant shot and injured as he sat in a car outside the office
18 September 1990	Staffordshire	Air Chief Marshall Sir Peter Terry was shot and injured at his home. His wife suffered minor injuries
27 September 1990	Royal Overseas League, Park Place, London WC1	Device discovered and defused. No injuries
24 January 1991	Territorial Army Firing Range, Cannock Chase, Staffordshire	Small explosion and a shot was fired. No injuries
7 February 1991	Downing Street, London SW1	Three mortar bombs fired. One minor injury
18 February 1991	Paddington Station, London W2	Device exploded. No injuries
	Victoria Station, London SW1	Device exploded. One man killed and 38 people injured
25 February 1991	Napsbury Lane, St. Albans	Device exploded on a railway line. No injuries
3 April 1991	Preston Railway Station, Preston, Lancashire	A number of incendiary devices were found on a platform. No injuries
5 April 1991	Arndale Shopping Centre, Manchester	A number of devices were discovered in shops, some of which caused fires. No injuries
28 June 1991	Beck Theatre, Hayes, Middlesex	Device discovered and defused outside the theatre. No injuries
30 June 1991	Royal Navy and RAF Recruiting Office, Fishergate Centre, Preston	Device discovered. Detonated in controlled explosion. No injuries
5 August 1991	Cambridge Public House, Charing Cross Road, London	Fire caused by incendiary devices. No injuries
29 August 1991	London Underground Depot, Hammersmith W6	Three incendiary devices discovered under a seat. No injuries
31 August 1991	Bargain Bookshop, Charing Cross Road, London WC2	Incendiary device discovered. No injuries
15 November 1991	Old Barclays Bank, St. Peters Street, St. Albans, Hertfordshire	Device exploded killing two members of the Provisional IRA. A member of the public was injured
1 December 1991	The Discount Furniture Store Habitat, The World of Leather, The Reject Shop, Tottenham Court Road	A number of incendiary devices ignited causing damage to property but no injuries
2 December 1991	Littlewoods, Oxford Street, London W1	Incendiary device ignited. No injuries
7–8 December 1991	Various locations in Blackpool	A number of incendiary devices were discovered in locations around Blackpool. No injuries
8 December 1991	Arndale Centre, Manchester	Seven incendiary devices ignited. No injuries
14 December 1991	Brent Cross Shopping Centre	Four devices found in shops. No injuries
15 December 1991	Sainsbury Wing, National Gallery, London WC2	An incendiary device partially ignited. No injuries
16 December 1991	Railway line near Clapham Junction	Bomb exploded on the railway line. No injuries
23 December 1991	Ilford Underground Depot	Incendiary device ignited. No injuries
	Neasden Underground Deport	Incendiary devices ignited. No injuries
	Train at Harrow on the Hill	Incendiary devices ignited. No injuries
10 January 1992	Whitehall Place, London SW1	Small device exploded. No injuries
17 January 1992	Marquis of Granby Public House, Shaftesbury Avenue, London W1	Two incendiary devices discovered. No injuries
30 January 1992	Elephant and Castle Underground Depot, London SE17	Incendiary device found. No injuries
3 February 1992	Neasden Underground Depot	Incendiary device found under seat. No injuries
7 February 1992	London Underground Sidings between Barking and Upney Stations	Incendiary device ignited. No injuries

Date	*Location*	*Death/injuries*
11 February 1992	Telephone box, Parliamentary Street, London SW1 (outside the Treasury)	Small device discovered and made safe. No injuries
28 February 1992	London Bridge Railway Station, London SE1	Device exploded injuring 29 people
29 February 1992	Crown Prosecution Service, London EC4	Device exploded injuring two people
1 March 1992	White Hart Lane BR Station Tottenham, London N17	Small device discovered and defused
10 March 1992	Near Wandsworth Common Railway Station, London SW18	Small device exploded beside railway line. No injuries
6 April 1992	Bridle Lane, near Piccadilly Circus, London W1	Device exploded outside a building housing various offices
10 April 1992	St. Mary Axe, City of London EC3	Large improvised explosive device exploded killing three people and injuring 91. Many properties damaged
11 April 1992	Staples Corner, Junction of M1 and North Circular Road	Large improvised explosive device exploded causing serious damage to roads and nearby buildings
9–10 May 1992	Metro Centre, Gateshead	A number of incendiary devices ignited causing minimal damage
7 June 1992	Royal Festival Hall, London SE1	Device exploded causing blast damage. No injuries
8 June 1992	A64 Leeds-York near Tadcaster, North Yorkshire	Constable Goodman was shot and killed and a PC seriously injured by two gunmen
10 June 1992	Wilcox Place, Victoria Street	Small device exploded in a litter bin near the Army and Navy Dept. Store. No injuries
15 June 1992	St. Albans Street, near Piccadilly Circus	Device exploded in a cab, which had been hijacked. No injuries
25 June 1992	Coleman Street, City of London EC2	Device exploded hidden in a brief case under a car. Limited damage. One police officer suffered shock
30-31 July 1992	Milton Keynes (Shops, Library)	Two incendiary devices discovered—only minimal damage caused
25 August 1992	Shropshire Regimental Museum and two furniture shops, Shrewsbury	A small device exploded at the museum and incendiary devices ignited in the shops. Some damage caused in the museum
6 September 1992	London Hilton Hotel, Park Lane, London W1	Small device exploded in the gents' toilets in the foyer of the hotel. Little damage and no casualties
17 September 1992	Madame Tussaud's, Marylebone Road, London NW1	Two incendiary devices caused a small fire
	The Planetarium, Marylebone Road, London NW1	A small device exploded causing minor damage
	Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1	Two incendiary devices discovered and extinguished. Minor damage caused
7 October 1992	Junction of The Haymarket and Panton Street, Piccadilly SW1	Small device exploded in a litter bin. Five people suffered minor injuries. Minimal damage
	Near Centre Point, Flitcroft Street, London WC2	Small device exploded behind a BT junction box. Slight damage and no casualties
8 October 1992	Tooley Street, London SE1	Device exploded under a car causing damage to two other cars. One person slightly injured
	Melcombe Street, London NW1	Small device exploded under a car, causing little damage and no injuries
9 October 1992	Royal British Legion, Nursery Road, Southgate N14	Small device exploded under a car in the car park. No injuries
	Car Park, Arnos Grove Underground Station	Small device exploded under a car. No injuries
10 October 1992	Paddington Green Police Station, Harrow Road, Paddington W2	Device exploded in a phone box outside the police station. One person injured
12 October 1992	Sussex Arms Public House, Long Acre, Convent Garden	A device exploded in the gents' toilets killing one person (who died the following day as a result of injuries) and injuring four others
19 October 1992	Novotel Hotel, Shortlands, Hammersmith W6	Small device exploded under the wheel arch of a coach parked outside the Hotel. No casualties
	Oxenden Street, London SW1	Device exploded under a car. Two people treated for shock
21 October 1992	Railway Line, Nr Silver Street Station Edmonton	Device exploded on the track as a train was passing, causing little damage. Two people were treated for minor injuries

Date	*Location*	*Death/injuries*
21 October 1992 *(Cont.)*	Princess Louise Territorial Army Centre, Hammersmith Road W6	Device, believed to have been hung on railings, exploded. Three people suffered minor injuries
	Railway Line, Nr Harrow Road (junction with Furness Road) NW10	Device exploded causing slight damage to the track, but no casualties.
22 October 1992	Sewage Pipe, Wick Lane E3	Small device exploded causing damage to a sewage pipe. No casualties
25 October 1992	London SW1	Device exploded in a doorway causing some damage to the building and to nearby cars. No casualties
30 October 1992	Whitehall, London SW1 (nr Downing Street)	Small device exploded in a hijacked minicab outside Cabinet Office. No one was injured
14 November 1992	Stoke Newington Road, London N16	Van discovered containing a very large improvised explosive device. One policeman was shot and injured confronting two men
15 November 1992	Canada Tower, Canary Wharf	Large improvised explosive device is made safe after security guards challenged two men
16 November 1992	Collingwood Street, Bethnal Green E1	Device in van made safe
1 December 1992	Stephens Street/Tottenham Court Road	Large improvised explosive device in van made safe
3 December 1992	Deansgate and Cateaton Street, Manchester	Two small devices exploded under bushes causing damage to properties and minor injury to 64 people
9 December 1992	Woodside Park Underground Station, London N12	HME device partially detonated in a van in car park. No injuries
10 December 1992	Wood Green Shopping Centre, London N22	Two devices exploded in litter bins outside shops. Eleven people were slightly injured
16 December 1992	John Lewis Department Store Oxford Street W1	Small device exploded in the gents' toilets on the third floor. One person was treated for shock
	Cavendish Square W1	Small device exploded in a litter bin. Three people were slightly injured
22 December 1992	Hampstead Tube Station	Small device exploded on emergency staircase
6 January 1993	Reject Shop, Plaza Shopping Centre, London W1	Incendiary device ignited causing minor damage
	Dillons' Bookshop, Northumberland Avenue WC2	Very small device exploded causing little damage
	C and A, Oxford Street W1	Incendiary device ignited. Very little damage
	Video Shop, 60 Oxford Street W1	Incendiary device ignited. Minor damage
7 January 1993	Dillon's Bookshop, Northumberland Avenue W1	Unignited incendiary device found
14 January 1993	Top Shop, Oxford Circus W1	Unignited incendiary device found
28 January 1993	Harrods, Brompton Road SW1	Small device exploded in a litter bin. Two people slightly injured and 30 ft of shop front damaged
3 February 1993	Train at Kent House Station, Kent	Small device exploded on train stopped and evacuated following warnings. No casualties
	South Kensington Tube Station, London SW7	Device exploded in underground passage-way following warning and evacuation. No casualties
10 February 1993	London SW1	Small device exploded in doorway of block of flats. Minor damage. No injuries.
26 February 1993	Warrington, Cheshire	Policeman shot and injured after stopping a van; a car hijacked; and three devices exploded (and unignited incendiary made safe) at gasworks causing extensive damage and no injuries.
27 February 1993	Camden High Street NW1	Small device exploded in litter bin. 18 people injured—two seriously
20 March 1993	Bridge Street, Warrington, Cheshire	Two small devices exploded in litter bins in shopping area. Two children killed and 54 people injured, four extremely seriously
7 April 1993	Argyle Square, London WC1	Small device exploded in builders skip. Minor damage. No injuries
23 April 1993	Esso Oil Refinery, North Shields	Small device exploded next to pipe carrying heavy oil. No injuries. Some damage

Date	Location	Death/injuries
24 April 1993	Bishopsgate, London EC2	Large improvised explosive device exploded killing one person and injuring 44 more. Extensive damage to properties
	Manor House Tube Station, London N22	Small device exploded in hijacked minicab. No injuries
	Judd Street, St. Pancras, London WC1	Small device exploded in hijacked minicab. No injuries
9 May 1993	Galleries Shopping Centre, Bristol	Two incendiaries ignited, in the Reject Shop and Waterstone Bookshop. No injuries
12 May 1993	Reject Shop, Commarket, Oxford	Incendiary device malfunctioned. No injuries
9 June 1993	Gas Installation, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear	Small explosive device detonated causing fire and damage to gas storage tank. No injuries
	Esso Oil Refinery, North Shields	Two small explosive devices detonated on pipes leading to storage tanks. Little damage, no injuries
13 August 1993	Locations in Bournemouth	Six incendiary devices in retail outlets in Bournemouth. Some ignited causing damage. Two small devices on the pier. One exploded. No injuries
28 August 1993	Wormwood Street, London (City) EC2	Small device discovered containing semtex. Disrupted by controlled explosion. No damage. No injuries
16 September 1993	Curzon Phoenix Cinema, Charing Cross Road WC2	Two small incendiary devices found. Had malfunctioned, no damage, no injuries
	MGM Cinema, Shaftsbury Avenue WC2	One small incendiary device found. Had malfunctioned, no damage, no injuries
2 October 1993	Finchley Road, London NW8	Three devices exploded. Five people injured some localised damage. One device found and made safe
4 October 1993	Tottenham Lane, London N8	Two devices exploded. No injuries. Some localised damage
	Archway Road, London N19	Two devices exploded. No injuries. Some localised damage
4 October 1993 *(Cont.)*	Highgate High Street, London N6	One device exploded. No injuries, some localised damage. A second device discovered and made safe
8 October 1993	Junction of Coles Green Road and Humber Road near the North Circular Road junction of Staples Corner NW2	One device exploded. No injuries, some localised damage
	Outside the Black Lion Public House at 295 West End Lane NW6	One device exploded. No injuries, some localised damage
23 October 1993	Wooton Underwood, Brill, Buckinghamshire	Device exploded, damaging footbridge over railway
24 October 1993	Reading Station	One device in toilets made safe. Another device later exploded by the tracks; no injuries and little damage
24 October 1993	Basingstoke Station	One device in toilets made safe
29 October 1993	Edwardes Square W8	Small device exploded beside a car. Extensive damage to car, no injuries
14 December 1993	Railway line near Woking station, Surrey	Small device exploded on railway line. Slight damage to line. No injuries
16 December 1993	Railway line, near Brookwood and Farnborough stations, Surrey	Two devices discovered. Disrupted by controlled explosion
20 December 1993	Sorting Office, London EC1	Postal device discovered. Made safe. No damage. No injuries
	Travellers Tavern, Elizabeth Street, Victoria, London SW1	6 devices discovered in a holdall. At least one ignited. No injuries, minor damage
	Mount Pleasant Sorting Office, London EC1	Package ignited. No injuries, minor damage
	Northfields Tube Station, London W13	Small device ignited in a litter bin. No significant damage and no injuries
27 January 1994	C and A, Oxford Street W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage
	Mothercare, Oxford Street W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage
	Silverdale Travel Goods, Oxford Street W1	Incendiary device ignited; some damage
28 January 1994	C and A, Oxford Street W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage
	Mothercare, Oxford Street W1	Incendiary device made safe
29 January 1994	Nightingales, Oxford Street W1	One incendiary device ignited and another made safe; little damage

Date	Location	Death/injuries
18 February 1994	Record shop, 157 Charing Cross Road WC2	Incendiary device discovered and made safe
19 February 1994	Record Shop, 157 Charing Cross Road WC2	Very small high explosive device exploded; minor damage
	Top Shop, Oxford Circus W1	Two incendiary devices ignited; little damage
	Hennes Oxford Circus W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage
19 February 1994	Newsagents, Great Cumberland Place W1	Incendiary device ignited destroying shop
	Burtons, New Oxford Street WC1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage. A further device was discovered
	Burtons, Regent Street W1	Incendiary device ignited and very small high explosive device detonated; little damage
	Liberty's, Regent Street W1	Incendiary device ignited; little damage
	Mr. Byrite, Oxford Circus W1	Incendiary device made safe
22 February 1994	Mr. Handy, Edgware Road W2	Incendiary device made safe
9 March 1994	Heathrow Airport, London	4 mortars launched from a car parked at the Excelsior Hotel, landing on or near the northern runway. None exploded and there was no damage
11 March 1994	Heathrow Airport, London	4 mortars launched from waste ground, landing on an aircraft parking area near Terminal Four. None exploded and there was no damage
13 March 1994	Heathrow Airport, London	5 mortars launched from waste ground, landing in the vicinity of Terminal Four. None exploded and there was no damage
15 March 1994	Railway line near Sevenoaks, Kent	IED discovered. Believed to be left over from the series of attacks in December but had failed to detonate
21 March 1994	Railway line Orpington, Kent	Timer of IED discovered. Believed to be left over from series of attacks in December but had failed to detonate
6 June 1994	Sevenoaks railway station, Kent	Device made safe in controlled explosion
10 June 1994	Liberty's Oxford Street, London W1	Two incendiary devices discovered and made safe
11 June 1994	Mr. Byrite's, Oxford Street, London W1	Incendiary device ignited causing little damage. A further device had failed to detonate
13 June 1994	Railway line, one mile from Stevenage station	Device exploded on embankment by railway line. Little damage
12 July 1994	Heysham port, Lancashire	Lorry found to contain approximately two tonnes of improvised explosive device
21 July 1994	Reading railway station	Stolen suitcase found to contain two incendiary devices along with component parts for six high explosive devices
13 August 1994	Shopping centre, Bognor Regis	Explosive device, left in a bicycle, detonated damaging 15 shops but causing no injuries
	Brighton pier, Sussex	Explosive device found in bicycle. Made safe by controlled explosion
22 August 1994	Regent Street W1	High explosive device found in litter bin outside Laura Ashley shop. Device defused—no injuries and no damage
9 February 1996	South Quay, Canary Wharf, London	Two people killed and some 40 injured in an explosion
15 February 1996	Junction of Charing Cross Road and Litchfield Street, London WC2	High explosive device in telephone kiosk disrupted by controlled explosion
18 February 1996	Wellington Street, London WC2	Improvised high explosive device detonated prematurely on a bus, killing the terrorist transporting the device and injuring eight other people

Hong Kong

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if holders of Hong Kong special administrative region passports will require visas to visit the United Kingdom from July 1997. [19203]

Mr. Howard: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is announcing in Hong Kong today, holders of Hong Kong special administrative region passports will not be required to obtain visas for short visits to Britain after 30 June 1997. We will, of course, keep this arrangement under review, as we do with the visa arrangements we apply in every other part of the world.

Prisoners (Sanitation)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provision of 24-hour access to sanitation for prisoners. [19204]

Miss Widdecombe: The deadline for providing all prisoners with 24-hour access to sanitation was 29 February. On 29 February over 99 per cent. of prisoners had 24-hour access to sanitation. If every cell without sanitation had been withdrawn from use on that date there would have been a loss of 267 places in the area between Leeds and Liverpool and this would have increased the likelihood of using police cells in that region. For this reason I approved the retention of some cells without sanitation until early April, when other accommodation opens.

Since the sanitation programme was announced in 1991, over 19,000 places have been provided with sanitation. During this period the prison population has increased by approximately 30 per cent. I anticipate that all prisoners will have 24-hour access to sanitation by 12 April 1996. The delay has been caused primarily by the need to include necessary security improvements in the refurbishment programme.

Statistics (Gender Breakdown)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to collect statistics broken down by gender where relevant. [17683]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* Statistics about people produced by my Department are normally based on administrative systems which include information on sex. Statistical information about people can therefore usually be broken down by sex.

East Birmingham Task Force

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the projects which received money from the east Birmingham task force between the years 1988 and 1993 and *(b)* how much money was given to each of the projects. [17895]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

The information has been placed in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

High-voltage Power Cables

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue guidance notes on health care for people living near to high-voltage power cables; and if he will make a statement. [17133]

Mr. Horam: None. The National Radiological Protection Board has advised that there is no convincing evidence that electromagnetic fields present a hazard to public health at domestic levels of exposure. The board further advises that epidemiological studies related to possible risks of cancer do not provide a basis for setting exposure standards as there is no evidence of any adverse effects. The Department will continue to monitor the situation and maintain support for research in these areas, consulting the NRPB and the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment as necessary.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent reports he has received regarding health risks posed by high-voltage power lines near busy roads. [17128]

Mr. Horam: None.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the projects which caused the overspend in class A3 of the 1994–95 class XII, vote 3 appropriation accounts. [17801]

Mr. Horam: Additional refurbishment of departmental buildings became necessary leading to additional payments in respect of new works over £150,000 and furniture and fittings. The most significant projects in these categories were:

refurbishment of toilets;

installation of new lighting to comply with regulations on VDU use;

conversion of redundant reprographic facility to offices;

moving staff into the newly-occupied Hannibal house.

Lariam

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *243*, what *(a)* representations and *(b)* reports he has received alleging adverse side effects arising from the anti-malarial treatment lariam; and if he will make a statement. [18221]

Mr. Horam: Ministers have received a small amount of correspondence concerning the possible side-effects of lariam—mefloquine.

From 1990, when lariam was launched in the United Kingdom, to 27 February 1996, the Medicines Control Agency has received 757 reports of 2,054 suspected adverse reactions for mefloquine. This is an increase of 152 reports—the majority of which are not serious—since the answer I gave on 24 January 1996. However, this number of reports is not unexpected in view of recent media attention concerning lariam which encouraged patients to report possible reactions. Receipt of a report of a reaction does not necessarily mean that it has been caused by lariam. The product information for doctors and patients provides information on the adverse effects of lariam.

The Medicines Control Agency will continue to monitor lariam and review any new evidence that may emerge to ensure that the potential benefits outweigh the risks.

Breast Screening

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *336*, if he will make it his policy that health authorities communicate directly with all women over 65 years of age who have previously received breast screening to inform them of their rights to continued screening. [17969]

Mr. Horam: It is already policy that health authorities inform all women of 65 years of age who have previously received breast screening of their right to continued

screening. Screening units are reminded by the national health service screening programme to encourage women to continue to come for three-yearly screening, and this is emphasised in screening and well woman literature available in GP surgeries, clinics and screening centres.

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if all mammography screening facilities in the United Kingdom have to obtain certification to a quality assurance standard; and what this standard is based on. [18329]

Mr. Horam: No. All mammographic screening facilities have to comply with the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985 and 1988. This is facilitated by compliance with stringent quality assurance standards set by the national health service breast screening programme.

Audit Letters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which bodies receive copies of the audit letter issued to NHS trusts by the Audit Commission. [17928]

Mr. Horam: Management letters from statutory auditors are addressed to the national health service trust concerned. They are copied to the appropriate regional health authority.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue instructions to NHS trusts to provide copies of audit letters issued to NHS trusts to *(a)* constituency hon. Members, *(b)* members of the public and *(c)* the local press who request them. [18037]

Mr. Horam: National health service trusts may make this information available on request, but these matters are primarily between the appointed auditor and the trust concerned.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require the auditors of NHS trusts to provide copies of their audit letters to *(a)* constituency hon. Members, *(b)* members of the public and *(c)* the local press who request them. [18038]

Mr. Horam: Statutory auditors of national health service trusts are appointed by the Audit Commission and it is not for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to instruct them on these matters.

Yorkshire Cancer Organisation

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, columns *290–91*, on the Yorkshire Cancer Organisation, what proposals the Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority or the NHS Executive have considered to relocate the Yorkshire Cancer Organisation away from Leeds. [18079]

Mr. Horam: None.

Fraud

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of fraud occurred in each year since 1985 in NHS trusts and health authorities; and what was the total value of such fraud. [17946]

Mr. Horam: The cost of fraud is not separately identified in the accounts or the losses and special payments returns submitted by NHS units in England.

Oncology Centres

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which oncology centres are refusing patients treatment on grounds of lack of money. [17942]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Mental Health

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the health authorities covered by the survey of mental health provision indicating which categories of 1, 2a, 2b or 3 each falls into. [17937]

Mr. Bowis: We already have, in the "Review of the Purchasing of Mental Health Services by Health Authorities in England", issued on 20 February, copies of which are available in the Library.

Ionising Radiation

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent the ionising radiation regulations apply to patients being exposed to radioactive sources for clinical treatment. [18328]

Mr. Horam: The Ionising Radiations (Protection of Persons Undergoing Medical Examination or Treatment) Regulations 1988 apply to all persons undergoing exposure to radiation for medical purposes.

Nursery Places

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many places were provided in nurseries for children under three years of age in England for each year since 1990. [18248]

Mr. Bowis: Information available centrally on day nurseries relates to places for children aged under five and was published by the Department of Health in "Children's day care facilities at 31 March 1994, England, A/F 94/16".

Information on pupils aged two at the beginning of the school year and attending nursery classes in maintained primary schools or maintained nursery schools was published by the Department for Education and Employment in "Statistical Bulletin 1/96: Pupils Under Five Years of Age in Schools in England—January 1995".

Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Toxic Shock Syndrome

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of toxic shock syndrome from women's use of tampons have been reported to the Medical Officer of Health in each of the last five years. [18562]

Mr. Horam: The following information has been collected by the central public health laboratory.

Number of cases of menstrually-associated toxic shock syndrome in:

1990: 15

1991: 14

1992: 11

1993: 12

1994: 8

The figures for 1995 are not yet available.

Human Embryos

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many human embryos have been frozen in each year since the practice was first sanctioned by law. [18317]

Mr. Horam: As recorded in the records of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the numbers of embryos stored were as follows:

1991: 4,920

1992: 15,932

1993: 19,717

1994: 23,484

Data for 1995 have not yet been validated.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many frozen human embryos have been experimented on and then destroyed since the practice was first sanctioned by law; [18318]

(2) how many unfrozen human embryos have been experimented on and then destroyed since the practice was first sanctioned by law. [18319]

Mr. Horam: The total number of embryos created from 1991 to 1994 was 498,493. Of these, 27,493 embryos were donated for research; it is not, however, possible to give separate figures for frozen or unfrozen embryos.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many cases the parents of frozen embryos are currently untraceable; and what are the figures for parents of embryos frozen in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995. [18320]

Mr. Horam: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Statutory Storage Period for Embryos) Regulations 1996 enables all centres licensed under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 to contact couples with embryos in store under the five-year limit arrangements so that the possibility of extension can be considered. It is not possible at this stage to judge how many will not be traced.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects of deep freezing on *(a)* the human embryo, *(b)* the likelihood of mutation in the embryo and *(c)* the chance of achieving a successful pregnancy using a frozen embryo. [18361]

Mr. Horam: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's working group on embryo freezing considered the scientific and ethical aspects of embryo freezing. It undertook a review of the literature on embryo freezing and established that the evidence suggests that there are no long-term genetic implications arising out of current cryopreservation methods. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that the current freezing protocols are harmful to humans.

The working group also established that there is good scientific evidence from animal studies that viable embryos stored under proper conditions will not suffer harm from cryopreservation over very extended periods of time.

Two studies on children born from frozen embryos in the UK have shown that the rate of congenital abnormalities is no greater than in the general population.

In 1993 there were 3,002 treatment cycles using frozen embryos and there were 382 live births, giving a live birth rate of 12.7 per cent. compared with an unfrozen embryo live birth rate of 14.4 per cent.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many human embryos have not survived the freezing and defrosting process since the practice became legal. [18362]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available.

Consultancy Service Index

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of inquiries to the Department of Health consultancy service index, *(b)* the number of individuals who have been notified that they are to be included on the index and *(c)* the number of individuals who have appealed against inclusion on the index for each year since 1986. [18833]

Mr. Bowis: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Deregulation and Contracting Out Act

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the responses to his consultation on the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 and supervised activities and holiday play schemes. [18832]

Mr. Bowis: We are considering the responses received to the consultation document. The Government will give their response in due course.

Renal Services Review

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from kidney patients' associations concerning the publication of the national review of renal services. [18830]

Mr. Horam: Representations have been received from the National Kidney Federation concerning the publications of the national review of renal services and they will be meeting me to discuss this in April.

Alcohol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total number of people who died from *(a)* alcohol poisoning and *(b)* alcohol-related illnesses in each of the past five years. [18591]

Mr. Bowis: The numbers of people who died from alcohol poisoning[1] in England and Wales in the last five years are as follows:

1990: 153

1991: 152

1992: 126

1993: 136

1994: 122

[1] (Code 980, International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision).

I also refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 19 December 1995 at column *1148*.

Barnet Hospital

Sir John Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the role of the private finance initiative in the development of Barnet hospital. [18683]

Mr. Horam: The Wellhouse national health service trust, of which Barnet hospital is part, already has phase 1a of its development under construction and has had approval to the outline business case for phase 1b. It is now investigating the potential advantages to be gained by proceeding with this project under the private finance initiative. The trust is making good progress in its negotiations with potential private sector partners, and it intends to submit its full business case within the next few months.

District Health Authority Managers

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total remuneration of each NHS district health authority's general manager for 1990. [18743]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Domestic Violence Cases

31. **Ms Jowell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consideration he has given to empowering the police to pursue a civil remedy in domestic violence cases on behalf of a victim of violence in the home. [16447]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question of whether the police should have the power to pursue a civil remedy for domestic violence on behalf of victims has been considered in connection with the Family Law Bill and the former Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill. The Home Affairs Select Committee, in its 1993 report on domestic violence, and the House of Lords Special Bill Committee on the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill, did not support the police having this power because this would place unaccustomed responsibilities on them and would create confusion between the criminal and civil law. The Government agree with this view.

32. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the recommendations of the May 1992 Law Commission report on "Domestic Violence and Occupation of the Family Home" relating to police powers in respect of family protection. [16448]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The recommendations of the Law Commission report on domestic violence and occupation of the family home have substantially been included in part III of the Family Law Bill. The Bill strengthens police powers to deal with situations of domestic violence. The Law Commission's recommendations that the police should have the power to pursue civil remedies on behalf of victims has not been included in the Bill because this would place unaccustomed responsibilities on them and would create confusion between criminal and civil law.

Probate Service

33. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the conclusions of his Department's consultation process regarding the structure of the probate services. [16449]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No decisions have yet been made. Responses received during the consultation process are currently being considered.

Legal Aid

34. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent initiatives are being pursued to ensure the widest possible availability of legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [16450]

36. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the arrangements governing legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [16452]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to my oral answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) earlier today.

35. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has recently received about the payment of legal aid to the apparently wealthy. [16451]

Mr. Evans: I have received a number of representations on this subject. As my hon. Friend knows, the Lord Chancellor last week announced a number of measures to tighten up the means assessment process.

Divorce Law Reform

37. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the effect of his proposal to require a one-year wait for divorce upon marriages where there is a history of violence. [16453]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The circumstances of marriages with a history of violence were carefully considered in the preparation of the divorce reform proposals. I believe that

victims of violence are adequately protected by domestic violence legislation. Protection against domestic violence is not, and should not be, linked to the ability to get a divorce.

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what further plans he has to involve children of divorcing parents in his proposals for divorce law reform. [16446]

Mr. Evans: Our proposals will ensure that during the period for reflection and consideration parents will give close attention to the arrangements for children. Generally, our proposals are intended to reduce conflict between the parents, which will be to the advantage of children. Decisions relating to residence of and contact with children after divorce will continue to be dealt with under the Children Act 1989 and the welfare of children will continue to be paramount in these proceedings. We have no plans to increase the involvement of children in the legal process for divorce.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his plans to reform the law relating to divorce. [16813]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Family Law Bill, which implements the proposals on divorce and mediation set out in the White Paper, "Looking to the Future—Mediation and the Ground for Divorce", published in April 1995, was introduced in the House of Lords on 16 November 1995. It received its Second Reading on 30 November, completed its Committee Stage on 30 January 1996 and is currently on Report. The Bill also reintroduces family law and domestic violence proposals, amended from the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill, which did not complete all its stages in the last session.

Confiscation Orders

38. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training or guidance he has arranged to provide for judges with regard to the making of confiscation orders in corruption cases at the time of sentencing or shortly thereafter. [16454]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Judicial Studies Board, which is responsible for training judges, covers confiscation orders in its seminars for the Crown court judiciary. The board also recently published in its bulletin an article on the Proceeds of Crime Act 1995, which included confiscation orders.

EDS Ltd.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those contracts his Department currently holds with EDS indicating for each the *(a)* date of inception, *(b)* value and *(c)* duration. [17442]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Department currently holds no contracts with EDS.

Women Judges

Ms Jowell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many women were appointed as judges in the High Court, county court and the Court of Appeal for each year since 1990; and what proportion these women represent of the total number of judges. [18247]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The table shows the total number and the number and proportion of women appointed to the Court of Appeal, the High Court and as circuit judges in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995. The end column lists the total number of judges in post, as a combined figures, as at 31 December for each year, and the number and proportion of women. The figures for 1990 are not readily available.

	Number of Lord Justices of Appeal appointed		*Number of High Court judges appointed*		*Number of circuit judges appointed*		*Total number in post and proportion of women*	
	Total	*Women*	*Total*	*Women*	*Total*	*Women*	*Total*	*Women*
1991	0	0	5	0	49	3	568	24 4.2 per cent.
1992	5	0	11	2	54	4	594	29 4.9 per cent.
1993	5	0	22	2	48	5	622	34 5.5 per cent.
1994	4	0	8	1	35	2	638	36 5.6 per cent.
1995	9	0	12	1	41	6	645	37 5.7 per cent.

Prince and Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what occasions he has advised or acted as an interlocutor for *(a)* Her Majesty the Queen and *(b)* the Prince and Princess of Wales in relation to, or about their respective private property and or other rights consequent on the separation of the Prince and Princess of Wales. [18884]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The matters raised by the hon. Member are confidential.

Great Seals

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the

public holding arrangements for the great seals issued for the period between 1617 and 1831 concerning patents granted. [17156]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Public Record Office is best placed to provide an answer. I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours, dated 4 March 1996:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about the public holdings arrangements concerning patents granted.

Copiers of letters patent issued over the great seal between 1617 and 1831 could be enrolled on the Chancery patent rolls. Under the Public Records Act 1958 these patent rolls are open for consultation by the public in the Public Record Office.

Not all letters patent were thus enrolled and the system of enrolment broke down from 1648 to 1659, for which period few rolls survive.

Original letters patent over the great seal were issued to the person to whom the grant was made. They thus passed into private hands, and were not subject to public holdings arrangements.

Contact Orders

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *718–19*, if he will now instruct the court service to begin to collate information of the number of cases where parents with care have been imprisoned following non-compliance with a contact order made under section 8 of the Children Act 1989. [17774]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No. On any item of legislation there is a profusion of information which it may or may not be useful to collect. The collection of statistical information places considerable demands on the time and resources of the Court Service, and thus must focus on the areas of central importance. My answer of 23 February gives details of the statistics collected on contact orders and other section 8 orders.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *718–19*, what plans his Department has to monitor *(a)* the workings of the Children Act 1989 and *(b)* legal cases arising from section 8 orders under the Children Act 1989. [17775]

Mr. Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 26 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *323*.

SCOTLAND

Police Officer Numbers

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors, other than population, determine police officer numbers per division in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland. [18054]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is for individual chief constables to decide the factors which are used to determine police officer numbers in their divisions.

William James McKay

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the work of the Crown Office in the case before Lord Hope in the Court of Criminal Appeal on 28 February. [18685]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The case concerned a note of appeal by the Lord Advocate in terms of section 228A(a) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975. On 5 December 1995 William James McKay pled guilty in the High Court at Glasgow to four charges of possessing quantities of controlled drugs with intent to supply them to another and one charge of unlawfully possessing a controlled drug. Following upon a plea in mitigation to the effect that the accused was now drug free and counselling young drug addicts, the trial judge deferred sentence for six months for good behaviour. The trial judge stated that were he to sentence the accused on the basis of his record of previous convictions and the offences to which he pled guilty, the sentence that he would have been thinking of imposing would have been one of seven years.

On 6 December 1995 the Lord Advocate became aware of the trial judge's decision to defer sentence in light of that plea in mitigation. On 11 December 1995, on the instructions of the Lord Advocate, the Crown Office wrote to the clerk of court asking to be provided with copies of all reports and documentation which were available to and placed before the trial judge. A written note, incorporating information provided by the trial advocate depute, was prepared by a Crown Office official for the Lord Advocate.

Appeals under section 228A(a) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975 require to be taken within 28 days. On 27 December 1995 the Lord Advocate decided to proceed with an appeal on the basis of the information available at the time. On the basis of that information it appeared to the Lord Advocate that, having regard to the whole circumstances of the case, the deferment of sentence by the trial judge had been inappropriate.

On 29 December 1995 a note of appeal was lodged on behalf of the Lord Advocate. It contained grounds of appeal to the effect that the deferment of sentence was inappropriate having regard to the gravity of the offences of which the accused had been convicted, the value and quantities of the various drugs referred to in the indictment, the fact that the accused was found in possession of the drugs in Her Majesty's prison Barlinnie, on the day following the imposition of a sentence of 18 months imprisonment in respect of a previous contravention of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the criminal record of the accused.

The grounds of appeal did not invite the court to lay down minimum sentences in respect of contraventions of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 committed in prisons. The trial judge's report about the case was sent to the Crown Office on 22 February 1996. It was accompanied by the documentation requested on 11 December 1995. When an appeal is taken under section 228A(a) of the 1975 Act, the Lord Advocate's position in respect of the appeal is reviewed after the trial judge's report becomes available. On receipt of the trial judge's report on the present case the papers were reviewed by Crown counsel. They were

then placed before the Lord Advocate. After studying the trial judge's report, the documentation which had been before the trial judge and a further report dated 16 February 1996 from the Glasgow community drugs project, the Lord Advocate decided not to proceed with the appeal which had been taken.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how employment levels in the Benefits Agency will be affected by the implementation of the jobseeker's allowance; [9792]

(2) how many surplus staff there will be in the Benefits Agency as a result of the implementation of the jobseeker's allowance. [9791]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Benefits Agency will be taking over payment of the contributory element of what is currently unemployment benefit when jobseeker's allowance is introduced. There will be no jobs cut in the Benefits Agency as a result of the implementation of jobseeker's allowance nor will there be any surplus staff.

Income Support

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support claims ceased within four weeks of liable relatives action in each year since 1989. [14457]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is in the table:

Year	*Number*
1989–90	47,122
1990–91	60,056
1991–92	80,261
1992–93[1]	16,142
1993–94	24,383
1994–95	12,937
1995–96[2]	15,186

[1] Figures for 1992–93 onwards relate to spousal maintenance and sponsored immigrants only.
[2] To December 1995.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in respect of how many claims involving liable relatives income support ceased within four weeks in *(a)* 1989–90 and *(b)* 1990–91. [15831]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is not available.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the benefit savings attributable to the Child Support Agency if a multiplier of 21 weeks were used when considering the savings due to the withdrawal of income support claims. [15754]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is as follows:

1993–94: £327 million

1994–95: £348 million.

These figures include savings where:

the level of child maintenance reduced the amount of income support in payment;

the level of child maintenance removed the need for income support;

the claim for income support was withdrawn following Child Support Agency involvement;

and resultant housing benefit, council tax benefit, family credit and disability working allowance savings.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the liability of an individual served with a detachment of earnings order in the event of an employer not making prompt payments to the Child Support Agency; [17705]

(2) who has responsibility for the collection of money when an employer has failed to comply with a detachment of earnings order. [17707]

Mr. Mitchell: Absent parents who have a liability to make payments of child support maintenance remain liable until the payment in question is made to the appropriate person irrespective of the way in which that payment is collected. However, employers have a duty to pass on, to the Secretary of State, moneys collected direct from an absent parent's earnings under a deduction from earnings order. Payments must be made by the 19th day of the month following the month in which the deduction is made. Failure to comply with the requirements of a deduction from earnings order is an offence punishable by a fine.

Where, for any reason, a deduction from earnings order proves ineffective as a method of collecting payments of child support maintenance it is for the Secretary of State to consider what further action may be appropriate.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report,* column *568,* relating to the financial memorandum of the Child Support Bill, how he intends to quantify long-term effects on expenditure resulting from the activities of the Child Support Agency; and how he will ensure that any savings are solely the result of the activities of the agency. [18169]

Mr. Mitchell: As part of the process of evaluation of child support policy, estimates will be made of the possible pattern of public expenditure if the scheme had not been introduced. These will attempt to isolate the behavioural changes arising from the child support scheme compared with, for example, those resulting from other changes made in the benefit system, and demographic changes. Such an evaluation is necessarily long term, because of the staggered take-on of the Child Support Agency's caseload, and because the full impact of the new departures system will not be apparent for several years.

Isle of Wight (Expenditure)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure of his Department on the Isle of Wight in 1994–95 broken down by category. [16772]

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Industrial Injuries Scheme

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average annual amount paid to individual claimants of prescribed diseases under the industrial injuries scheme; and what is the average duration of claims for those diseases. [17219]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the format requested. Available figures relate to the number of assessments, not to claimants, and a person can be in receipt of more than one assessment. Based on prescribed disease assessments current at 2 April 1994, the average annual amount paid per industrial injuries disablement benefit assessment as a result of a prescribed disease was £1,669 at the 14 April 1993 rates. Of 43,184 assessments, current at 2 April 1994, 21,979 were for life awards and the average duration of the remainder was 46 months.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that the parliamentary constituency of Don Valley is covered by a single weather station in respect of cold weather payments; and if he will make a statement. [17373]

Mr. Roger Evans: The choice of weather stations for local areas is decided after consultation with the Meteorological Office. These linkages are constantly kept under review, and the Government have made a number of adjustments in successive years to ensure that weather stations are as representative as possible of the conditions in the areas they cover. Current Meteorological Office advice is that Leeds and Waddington are appropriate weather stations for the area in which the Don Valley constituency lies.

Where it can be shown that particular post code areas covering a large geographical area are not reasonably represented by the designated weather station or stations, the Department would consider, in consultation with the Meteorological Office, whether a change of weather station was appropriate. This would occur when the operation of the scheme is reviewed with the Meteorological Office after the end of March each year.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost of housing benefit paid to families living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in Argyll and Bute; what was the total for Scotland last year; and if he will make a statement. [17103]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently receiving invalidity benefit in the Rhondda benefit district; what percentage this is of the total population of working age; and what are the average percentages for *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England and Wales. [17506]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. The available information is as follows:

There were 32,814 people in receipt of incapacity benefit at the short-term—higher—and long-term rates in the Mid Glamorgan district of the Benefits Agency at 31 January 1996.

Notes:

1. Incapacity benefit replaced sickness and invalidity benefit on 13 April 1995.

2. Figure obtained from a 100 per cent. clerical count of cases in Benefit Agency offices.

3. The Mid Glamorgan district includes the following branch offices: Porth, Pontypridd, Tonypandy, Aberdare and Bridgend.

People in receipt of Invalidity Benefit on 2 April 1994 by country and percentage of working population

Country	*People in receipt of invalidity benefit*	*Percentage of the working population*
Wales	181,000	10
England	1,265,000	4
England and Wales	1,446,000	5

[1] The working population has been taken to be 16 to 64 for men and 16 to 59 for women.

[2] Invalidity benefit information based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants, rounded to the nearest thousand at 2 April 1994.

[3] Estimated mid-year 1994 population figures supplied by OPCS publication, "Population Trends".

Absent Parents

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average net income, after deductions for tax and national insurance, of those absent parents with full maintenance assessments who receive earned income. [17664]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The average net income of absent parents with earned income—including the self-employed—who have a full maintenance assessment is £194.52. The average child support liability for this group is £38.66, which is less than 20 per cent. of their average net income.

Social Fund

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make changes to the discretionary social fund; and if he will make a statement. [18907]

Mr. Roger Evans: We are introducing some minor amendments to the Secretary of State's directions and guidance on the help available from the discretionary social fund, the need for which we have identified in the course of our routine monitoring of the social fund.

Details of the amendments and a revised copy of the Secretary of State's directions and guidance to take effect from 1 April 1996 have been placed in the Library.

Supply Estimates

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out for each year since 1990–91 in respect of the supply estimates for each sub-head of the votes accounted for by the Department of Social Security*(a)* the original estimate, the amount of increase or

decrease for which approval was sought in the *(b)* summer, *(c)* winter and *(d)* spring supplementary estimates and the *(e)* amount of any excess vote; and which sub-heads were subject to a cash limit. [16678]

Mr. Burt: The table sets out the original estimate provision, the changes secured in the summer, winter, and spring supplementary estimates, and the amounts of any excess votes, for each of the votes accounted for by the Department of Social Security and for each year since 1990–91. Details of grants, expenditure, and receipts in respect of individual subheads of the votes are contained within the published appropriation accounts for each vote which are available in the Library.

£000

Vote Number	*Vote title*	*Original/revised*	*Summer*	*Winter*	*Spring*	*Excess*
1990–91						
Class XIV, Vote 1	Pension and disability benefits (non-contributory)	3,641,000	—	1,881,000	39,000	—
Class XIV, Vote 2	Income support	8,461,000	—	14,747	213,000	206,438
Class XIV, Vote 3	Family benefits	5,314,000	—	1	—	—
Class XIV, Vote 4	Social fund	152,000	—	—	11,400	—
Class XIV, Vote 5	Housing benefit, community charge benefit and transitional payments	3,536,041	444,000	—	166,480	—
Class XIV, Vote 6[1]	Housing benefit administration and community charge benefit administration	114,464	—	5,500	—	—
Class XIV, Vote 7[1]	DSS Administration and miscellaneous services	1,703,179	3,080	116	59,013	—
1991–92						
Class XIV, Vote 1	Gentral government administered social security benefits and other payments	20,719,198	210,000	1,680,076	804,496	—
Class XIV, Vote 2	Housing benefit, community charge benefit, payments, into the NI fund and payments into the social fund IRO regulated expenditure	4,581,930	—	236,531	45,900	—
Class XIV, Vote 3[1]	Housing benefit administration and community charge benefit administration, payments into the social fund IRO discretionary expenditure and other grants	292, 625	—	32,918	—	—
Class XIV, Vote 4[1]	DSS administration and miscellaneous services	1,838,770	42,658	19,789	22,716	—
1992-93						
Class XIV, Vote 1	Central Government administered social security benefits and other payments	25,623,405	145,000	1,435,000	448,745	353,952
Class XIV, Vote 2	Housing benefit, community charge benefit, payments into the NI fund and payments into the social fund IRO regulated expenditure	5,725,652	—	286,620	215,128	—
Class XIV, Vote 3[1]	Housing benefit administration and community charge benefit administration, payments into the social fund IRO discretionary expenditure and other grants	351,991	13,981	4,250	—	—
Class XIV, Vote 4[1]	DSS administration and miscellaneous services	2,270,076	—	1,922	21,426	—
1993-94						
Class XIII, Vote 1	Central government administered social security benefits and other payments	30,332,625	—	—	790,000	141,339
Class XIII, Vote 2	Housing benefit, council tax benefit, payments into the NI fund and payments into the social fund IRO regulated expenditure	14,141,567	—	886,600	63,955	—
Class XIII, Vote 3[1]	Housing benefit administration and council tax benefit administration, payments into the social fund IRO discretionary expenditure and other grants	402,647	—	—	—	—
Class XIII, Vote 4[1]	DSS administration and miscellaneous services	2,526,356	810	30,958	1,870	—
1994-95						
Class XIII, Vote 1	Central government administered social security benefits and other payments	32,006,440	—	—	395,365	139,668

£000

Vote Number	*Vote title*	*Original/revised*	*Summer*	*Winter*	*Spring*	*Excess*
Class XIII, Vote 2	Housing benefit, council tax benefit, payments into the NI Fund and payments into the social fund IRO regulated expenditure	13,628,051	—	375,000	152,238	—
Class XIII, Vote 3[1]	Housing benefit administration and council tax benefit administration, payments into the social fund IRO discretionary expenditure and other grants	425,044	—	—	—	—
Class XIII, Vote 4[1]	DSS administration and miscellaneous services	2,724,356	—	45,825	—	—

[1] This Vote is subject to a cash limit, the figures quoted above represent the NET provision.

Departmental Expenditure (Waveney)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure by his Department in Waveney in 1994–95; what it will be in 1995–96, broken down by category; and if he will make a statement. [17841]

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lone Mothers

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone mothers were in receipt of family credit in each year since 1994. [18250]

Mr. Roger Evans: There were 235,000 lone mothers receiving family credit in July 1994 and 266,000 in July 1995, the latest date for which figures are available.

Source: Family Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry July 1994 and July 1995.

Pension Rights (Divorce)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has commissioned on international comparisons of the treatment of pension rights on divorce; if he will set out the terms of reference of the project, the names of the researchers, the period of study and the estimated cost; what is the present status of the research; and when he expects to publish a report on the findings. [17591]

Mr. Heald: In September 1995, the Department commissioned Watson Wyatt, actuaries and consultants to carry out an International Comparison of the treatment of pension rights on divorce. Using local consultants in each country and drawing upon available literature, this work will provide comprehensive information on how pension rights are treated on divorce in nine countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the USA, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden. Work is currently in progress and the first draft report is expected in the Department at the end of March 1996. A final draft report should be available by the summer. Decisions on publication will be taken when the final draft is received. The cost of this research is £81,000.

Residential Care

Mr. MacGregor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of excluding the family home from calculation of means for the purpose of determining liability to pay for nursing home and other residential long-term care.

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

No detailed estimates have been made. To raise the upper capital limit used by local authorities when charging for residential care to the value of the average house would, we broadly estimate, cost some half a billion pounds. This is based on the current number of people who pay the total cost of such care; it takes no account of variation in usage which could result from such a change.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans his Department has to implement the MacSharry proposals to modulate the common agricultural policy, with specific regard to *(a)* a taper on milk support and *(b)* restructuring of the hill livestock compensation allowance; and if he will make a statement. [18604]

Mr. Baldry: The Commission's proposals to modulate CAP payments were rejected by the Agriculture Council when it agreed to reform the CAP in May 1992.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the active ingredients used in the dispersant used on the oil spill at Milford Haven in February. [17979]

Mr. Baldry: The dispersants used on oil spilt from the Sea Empress at Milford Haven contained the following ingredients:

Butyl glycol
Dioctyl sodium sulphosucinate
Ethoxylated fish oil
Ethoxylated sorbitan tri-tallate
Ethoxylated tall oil
Iso octanol
Odourless kerosene
Paraffin solvent
Polyethylene glycol fatty acid ester

Propylene glycol

Sodium dioctyl sulfosuccinate propylene glycol

Sorbitan monooleate

Sorbitan monooleate ethoxylate

Tall oil

Water.

NORTHERN IRELAND

National Continence Day

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to support National Continence Day on 19 March; and what plans he has to improve the incontinence service in Northern Ireland in 1996–97. [17140]

Mr. Moss: The Department of Health and Social Services will be funding a freephone helpline and arranging publicity for National Continence Day. In addition, continence advisers will be manning stands at shopping and health centres throughout Northern Ireland. A report will also be issued making recommendations for developments in continence services in 1996–97 and beyond.

Restraint and Confiscation Orders

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many restraint and confiscation orders have been obtained in each of the last three years; and for what amounts. [17148]

Sir John Wheeler: Restraint orders for the confiscation of the proceeds of drug trafficking and other crime are made under the Criminal Justice (Confiscation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1990. Details for the last three years are as follows:

Year	*Number of confiscation orders*	*Total value £*	*Number of restraint orders*
1993	nil	nil	2
1994	2	5,083.89	1
1995	39	28,106.39	3

Values for a restraint order cannot be accurately given since these are made against a person to prohibit him from dealing with property rather than for a specific amount.

Arts Council

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of co-operation between the Northern Ireland Arts Council and the arts council in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the Irish Republic; and what plans there are to enhance co-operation and promote more jointly funded projects. [17096]

Mr. Ancram: The chairmen and chief executives of the four Arts Councils in the United Kingdom meet from time to time to consider matters of common interest. Close co-operation has also evolved between the four councils in relation to their function as distributing bodies for the proceeds of the national lottery, with regular meetings at official level.

The chief executives of the Arts Councils in Northern Ireland, in the Republic of Ireland, in Scotland and in Wales meet annually to exchange information and ideas. Officers of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland are in frequent contact with officers of all four of the other Arts Councils about areas of mutual interest and individual projects which extend to more than one territory.

The Arts Councils of Northern Ireland and of the Republic of Ireland have held annual joint meetings since the mid-1970s at which areas of co-operation are explored. In 1994, the two councils established a joint committee, with four representatives from each council, which meets twice a year to explore and develop a variety of further cross-border initiatives with particular emphasis on the involvement of youth. The two Arts Councils already jointly fund a number of all-Ireland activities and organisations, and have agreed to make joint appointments of staff as and when necessary. They currently jointly employ an arts co-operation officer to encourage north/south co-operation and co-ordinate touring arts events in both territories.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times the chairman of the Northern Ireland Arts Council met the chairmen of the arts councils in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the Irish Republic in 1995. [17097]

Mr. Ancram: The chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland met his Scottish, English and Welsh counterparts on one occasion in 1995 while he had three meetings with the chairman of the Arts Council of the Republic of Ireland.

In addition to the above, the vice-chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland substituted for the chairman at one meeting with the chairmen of the Scottish, the English and the Welsh councils.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what projects were jointly funded between the Northern Ireland Arts Council and the arts council in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the Irish Republic in 1995; and at what cost. [17098]

Mr. Ancram: In 1995, the four UK Arts Councils and the Arts Council in the Republic of Ireland funded a five cities tour of poetry readings. The cost to the Arts Council of England was £22,000, with the other four councils contributing £1,000 each.

Jointly funded projects between individual councils were as follows:

(a) The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Scottish Arts Council jointly commissioned from Piers Hellawell a musical composition for the Highland festival in June 1996 at a cost of £650 to each Council.

(b) There were no projects jointly funded between the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Arts Council of England.

(c) There were no projects jointly funded between the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Arts Council of Wales.

(d) There were a large number of projects jointly funded between the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Arts Council in the Republic of Ireland. My officials are currently

gathering the information requested and I will write to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as it is available, and place the information in the Library of the House.

Community Work Programme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the number of applicants against the available places on the community work programme at the latest available date; and if he will make a statement. [18078]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for the reply to be given.

letter from Ian Walters to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 1 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question about applicants for the pilot Community Work Programme.

At 23 February 1996, the Partnerships established to manage the pilot Community Work Programme had received 708 applications for the 1,000 places targeted. At the same date 509 places were filled.

I hope that you find this reply useful.

Action for Community Employment Scheme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to replace the action for community employment scheme with the community work programme; and if he will make a statement. [18090]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for the reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 28 February 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question about the pilot Community Work Programme and ACE.

There are no plans to replace the Action for Community Employment programme with the Community Work Programme (CWP). The Training and Employment Agency will undertake during 1996/97 an evaluation of the CWP pilot as well as an in depth review of its policies and measures aimed at helping the long term unemployed back to work. It is not possible at this stage to say what changes, if any, to present programmes might result from these exercises.

I hope that you find this reply useful.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed reduction in the funding of the action for community employment scheme on the achievement of the objectives of the policy appraisal and fair treatment initiative. [17676]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 4 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question about the PAFT initiative and ACE.

Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment guidelines were applied to decisions regarding the future funding of the Action for Community Employment programme. The affect of the reduction in funding should not have a differential impact on the overall balance of the programme to PAFT target groups.

A report of the assessment which was made will be submitted for inclusion in the 1995 PAFT Annual Report due to be published later this year.

I hope that you find this reply useful.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been allocated to the Northern Ireland ACE training scheme to protect the jobs of core workers; for how long such protection will be extended; and which Department provided the funds. [18682]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Eric Illsley, dated 4 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question about the Action for Community Employment programme.

In her announcement on 19 February 1996 Baroness Denton indicated that up to £2 million would be made available in 1996–97 to allow ACE schemes more time to manage the reduction of their activities. It is not possible at present to say exactly how much of this sum will be used to help schemes which are losing core workers to phase them out over the year. The Agency is continuing to consult the Northern Ireland Federation of ACE Schemes on the implementation of the assistance package.

Until actual expenditure patterns become clearer during 1996–97 it will not be possible to say with certainty which Department has provided the funds. The Agency will seek to provide at least some of the funding from savings in other Agency programmes.

I hope that you find this reply helpful.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the funding of the action for community employment scheme came from the European structural funds in the last 12 months; how much of this money is to be allocated to the company development programme; and if he will make a statement. [17677]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 4 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency to reply to your question about European Union funding for the Action for Community Employment Scheme.

During the past 12 months, no European Union funding was awarded to the ACE scheme and therefore nothing was reallocated to the Company Development Programme from this source.

I hope that you find this reply useful.

Household Formation

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the rate of new household formation in each year since 1993; and what is the projected rate to the end of 1996. [18630]

Mr. Moss: Latest information available shows the following rates:

Year	*Rate of new household formation*
July 1993–June 1994	3.1 per cent. (17,530 new households)
July 1994–June 1995	2.5 per cent. (14,570 new households)
July 1995–June 1996	2.7 per cent. (15,870 new households)

Homelessness

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by county the total numbers of *(a)* families, *(b)* single men, *(c)* single women and *(d)* men and women under the age of 18 years, who were registered as homeless during (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995. [18631]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I am advised by the chief executive that figures can be provided only for those applicants who were accepted as homeless and awarded A1 priority status. The information is available only on a financial year basis and by Housing Executive region, not by county.

The information is as follows:

Housing executive region awarded A1 status

	1993–94	*1994–95*
Belfast		
Families	550	508
Single Men 18-59	144	125
Single Women 18-59	110	107
Men and Women under 18	55	37
South-east		
Families	511	478
Single Men 18-59	71	91
Single Women 18-59	96	95
Men and Women under 18	29	50
South		
Families	345	342
Single Men 18-59	52	66
Single Women 18-59	79	72
Men and Women under 18	28	33
North-east		
Families	330	325
Single Men 18-59	72	69
Single Women 18-59	67	67
Men and Women under 18	23	19
West		
Families	679	658
Single Men 18-59	114	141
Single Women 18-59	140	163
Men and Women under 18	55	52

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the percentage change of the number of A1 applicants in each Housing Executive region between 1994 and 1995; [18680]

(2) if he will list by Housing Executive region the total numbers on housing waiting lists and the number of A1 applicants. [18681]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I am advised by its chief executive that the total numbers on the housing waiting list, the number of applicants granted A1 status and the percentage change in A1 status at 31 March 1994 and 1995, by Housing Executive region, were as follows:

Northern Ireland housing executive region

	A1 Status		*Percentage change*
	1993–94	*1994–95*	
Belfast	557	648	+16
South-east	325	331	+2
South	156	146	–6
North-east	214	240	+12
West	438	557	+27
Housing associations			
Belfast Improved Houses/Oaklee[1]	63	81	+28
Total	1,753	2,003	+14

[1] These housing associations are included as they take prospective tenants exclusively from the Housing Executive waiting list.

Northern Ireland housing executive region: waiting list

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Belfast	5,686	6,268	6,195
South-east	4,416	4,367	4,423
South	2,805	2,652	2,678
North-east	4,493	4,103	4,082
West	4,512	4,782	4,512
Housing Associations			
Belfast Improved Houses/Oaklee[1]	1,050	1,183	1,347
Total	22,962	23,355	23,237

[1] These housing associations are included as they take prospective tenants exclusively from the Housing Executive waiting list.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Arts (Public Funding)

19. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of overall public funding provision for the arts. [16371]

Mr. Sproat: Funding for the arts in this country is at a higher level now than ever before. Through the four arts councils, the Government are giving £229 million this year. Local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales are providing revenue funding of around £237 million. Support last year from the business community reached a new peak at nearly £83 million. On top of this, the lottery has provided more than £277 million towards improving and increasing the availability and quality of the arts for everyone in the UK.

National Lottery

20. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many charities which assist young people have been awarded funds from the national lottery. [16373]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Over 1,000 awards, to a value of £75 million, have been made to organisations directly concerned with young people, 114 of which, worth more than £16 million, have been made directly to schools.

Helping the nation's young people is an investment in our future. That is why I have recently announced plans to widen the distribution of lottery proceeds—with a particular emphasis on youth. My proposals will give the lottery distributors the ability to provide revenue support for initiatives to help develop sporting and artistic excellence in our country's young people.

21. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the conclusions of monitoring the distribution of national lottery funds in relation to charities. [16374]

Mrs. Bottomley: Monitoring of the distribution of lottery proceeds is on going. To date 4,394 awards worth £556.2 million have been made to charities and voluntary organisations.

23. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to overcome the difficulties for lottery funds applications in inner city areas arising from the need to identify partnership funding. [16376]

Mrs. Bottomley: I recently met the chairmen of the lottery distributing bodies and encouraged them, within the existing directions issued under section 26 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, to take a flexible approach on partnership funding requirements, particularly when considering applications from areas in need of regeneration and in remote rural areas. The Sports Council has recently announced that it would be setting a lower limit for applicants based in any of 70 areas throughout England of economic and sporting deprivation. The partnership requirement can also be met by contributions in kind, such as voluntary labour, or the donation of land or equipment.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To asks the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will provide a breakdown of ticket sales for the national lottery on the same regional basis as the breakdown of value of all awards published in the December 1995 report on the distribution of national lottery proceeds; and if she will include such a breakdown of ticket sales in future monthly lottery reports. [16972]

Mr. Sproat: The breakdown of national lottery ticket sales is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. The Director General of the National Lottery has licensed Camelot to run the national lottery and he regulates its operations. I have therefore asked the director general to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Sport (Televising)

22. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received since the publication of her consultation document on the televising of sport. [16375]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has received representations from members of the public, Members of Parliament and from organisations representing consumers, broadcasters, sports bodies and regulatory authorities.

Film Industry

24. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent consultations she has had with representatives of the film industry. [16377]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I meet film industry representatives on a regular basis and had meetings last week with Sir David Puttnam and Sir Sydney Samuelson.

National Stadium (Manchester)

25. **Sir Fergus Mongomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received about the siting of a new stadium in Manchester for the Commonwealth games in 2002. [16378]

Mr. Sproat: I have received a number of representations about Manchester's plans for the Commonwealth games stadium but have not been directly involved in the decision making process. However, my officials have been kept in touch with progress.

Tourism Industry (Deregulation)

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress she has made in reducing excessive regulation in the tourism industry. [16365]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Good progress has been made. Measures such as the reforms of liquor licensing law, Sunday trading law and food hygiene regulation have all benefited tourism. My Department worked closely with the Department of Transport on the recent relaxation of the rules governing white-on-brown road signs. This will help a wide range of tourism-related businesses.

River Thames (Tourism)

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has for developing the tourist potential of the River Thames. [16370]

Mr. Sproat: In January my right hon. Friend launched the "Focus London" initiative to revitalise London's image as a tourist destination. Four million pounds of public money will be made available to be matched by the private sector. This will undoubtably boost tourism to the river area. We are working closely with the London tourist board and the Government office for London and private sector partners to ensure that we take full advantage of the excellent opportunities for sustainable tourism offered by the river.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will place in the Library a list of all overseas visits made by all Ministers of her Department since 1992, including *(a)* details of the places visited and brief reasons for the visit, *(b)* details of the size, composition and cost to public funds of the delegation

and *(c)* the names of non-ministerial members of each delegation and the capacity in which each was present. [17488]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* I have today placed in the House Libraries a list detailing all overseas visits made by all Ministers of my Department since 1992.

Total overseas travel and subsistence costs for Ministers and accompanying private secretaries were £15,807.57 in 1993–94; £46,125.09 in 1994–95; and £23,800.89, so far in 1995–96. Figures for 1992–93 are not available.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Allen: To ask the Attorney-General what consultations he has had with the Secretary to the Cabinet concerning the Government's response to the Scott inquiry; and where and when such consultations took place. [16607]

The Attorney-General *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* Successive Governments have not disclosed the nature or the specific sources of the advice they receive from the civil service.

Confiscation Unit

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if he will review with the service heads the resources allocated to the confiscation unit; [17146]

(2) if he will review with the Director of Public Prosecutions the resources allocated to the confiscation unit. [17143]

The Attorney-General: The central confiscation branch is part of the central casework area of the Crown Prosecution Service. Whilst the allocation of resources within the service is primarily a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions I regularly discuss with her the allocation of resources to the service as a whole.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Attorney-General how many full-time staff there are in the confiscation unit of the Crown Prosecution Service. [17141]

The Attorney-General: The central confiscation branch, which is part of the central casework area of the Crown Prosecution Service, has eight lawyers, two accountancy technicians, and eight caseworkers working full time. In addition, there are two lawyers and one accountancy technician working part time.

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General what monitoring is undertaken of the documents relating to PII claims; and if he will make a statement. [17792]

The Attorney-General: It is for the Minister or other responsible person advancing a PII claim to satisfy himself that the documents fall within the scope of the claim as formulated.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what is the definition his Department follows of public interest in relation to a PII certificate; and if he will make a statement; [17555]

The Attorney-General: The law on public interest immunity is judge-made. The courts have held that a PII claim may be advanced with respect to a document either on the basis of its contents or because it belongs to one of the established PII classes.

As to the future, I have announced that the Government are considering carefully the recommendations in the Scott report in relation to PII and are seeking the views of interested parties. The Government intend that the House will have an opportunity to consider the circumstances in which PII should be claimed by Ministers and the criteria for those claims, *Official Report*, 26 February 1996, column *684*.

Prince and Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General on what occasions he has advised, or acted as an interlocutor, for *(a)* Her Majesty the Queen and *(b)* the Prince and Princess of Wales in relation to, or about their respective private property and/or other rights consequent on the separation of the Prince and Princess of Wales. [18885]

The Attorney-General: The matters raised by the hon. Member are confidential.

WALES

Health Care Budget

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the total annual budget in Wales is designated for health care; and if he will make a statement. [17516]

Mr. Richards: Provision for the national health service in Wales currently represents about 33 per cent. of total expenditure within the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

A470

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's future plans concerning the improvement of the A470 in Powys. [17528]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Plans for major improvements on the A470 in Powys in 1996–97 and future years will be included in the 1996 Welsh Office departmental report to be published later this month. In addition there are five schemes in the medium—under £3 million— programme for construction in the next three years. Further schemes are planned.

Gwent Health Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he was *(a)* consulted or *(b)* informed beforehand about the decision to appoint Maggie Aikman as director of finance of the Gwent Health Commission. [17545]

Mr. Richards: An official from the Welsh Office was one of two independent assessors present during the interviews. The decision to appoint Mrs. Aikman was taken by Gwent health authority on the basis of appropriate information about each of the candidates.

Inward Investment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the director of Invest in Britain to discuss trends in the number of inward investment company visits arranged by Invest in Britain which led to visits by these companies to Wales. [17228]

Mr. Hague: No. My Department and the Welsh Development Agency work closely with the bureau on this and other matters. I am keen to see as many company visits to Wales as possible.

Sheep

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage and the number of lame sheep in the national flock. [17504]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government have been funding the Royal Veterinary college to carry out a study into ovine lameness. The first part of the study, a survey of a random sample of sheep holdings, found a reported incidence of lameness of about 8 per cent. in 1993–94. This is now being followed up by on-farm investigations into the different causes of lameness with a view to developing improved methods of control.

Abattoirs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance he has given the abattoir industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [17439]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Seven companies have accepted grant aid for assistance towards the abattoir industry in Wales under regional selective assistance and agricultural and marketing grants, with a total value of £2.3 million. These projects were forecast to create or safeguard 408 jobs and involve £10.5 million of private investment.

Wales European Centre, Brussels

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial assistance is being made available this year by his Department towards the maintenance of the Wales European Centre in Brussels. [17886]

Mr. Hague: None.

Electricity Supply

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will examine the reasons for the interruption to electricity supplies in Wales during the recent severely cold weather; and if he will make a statement about the adequacy of the electricity supply network in Wales and of the quality of maintenance and frequency of replacement of parts of that network. [18363]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I met SWALEC's chief executive recently to discuss these matters. Action on the issues you raise is properly the responsibility of the company itself and the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Telecommunications Masts

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is pursuing in Wales to regulate the construction of telecommunications masts, electricity towers and wind generators in areas of outstanding natural beauty and on high ridges. [18364]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government are committed to the protection of the countryside generally and to high quality landscapes in particular, while providing for the growth of telecommunication systems and renewable energy sources. Policy guidance to local planning authorities on these matters is contained in planning policy guidance note 8 "Telecommunications" and note 22 "Renewable Energy". The regulation of overhead electricity lines is a matter for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Urban Design

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to encourage higher standards of urban design in respect of new developments in towns and villages in Wales. [18365]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend and I want to see a high standard of design which contributes to the quality of people's lives and can help to revitalise our urban areas and attract business and investment to them. Responsibility for good design rests with designers and developers. What Government must do is to encourage and not prescribe. Planning policy guidance note 1 advises planning authorities that good design should be the aim of all involved in the development process.

Domestic Services (Prices)

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) by what percentage the price of gas for industrial and commercial customers has changed in Wales over the past five years, on a year-by-year basis; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the changes; [18462]

(2) by what percentage the price of electricity for commercial and industrial customers has changed in Wales over the past five years, on a year-by-year basis; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the changes; [18464]

(3) by what percentage the price of telecommunications for industrial and commercial customers has changed in Wales over the past five years, on a year-by-year basis; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the changes; [18460]

(4) by what percentage the price of telecommunications for domestic customers has changed in Wales over the past five years, on a year-by-year basis; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the changes; [18461]

(5) by what percentage the price of gas for domestic customers has changed in Wales over the past five years, on a year-by-year basis; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the changes; [18463]

(6) by what percentage the price of electricity for domestic customers has changed in Wales over the past five years, on a year-by-year basis; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the changes. [18465]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available separately for Wales.

Water Services

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) by what percentage the price of water and water services for domestic customers has changed in Wales over the past five years, on a year-by-year basis; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the changes. [18466]

(2) by what percentage the price of water and water services for commercial and industrial customers has changed in Wales over the past five years, on a year-by-year basis; and what assessment he has made to the reasons for the changes. [18372]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The yearly average percentage increases in water and sewerage charges to household customers in Wales served by Dwr Cymru Cyfyngedig are as follows:

Financial year	*Annual percentage increase*
1991–92	15.92
1992–93	8.11
1993–94	9.41
1994–95	9.45
1995–96	3.25

Source:
Office of Water Services.

Meaningful average increase figures are not available for commercial and industrial customers as the average commercial customer and average commercial use can change significantly from year to year.

Sample bills for non-household customers are provided in Ofwat's report on tariff structure and charges, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

M4 (Fencing Contract)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will make final settlement to Haycan Ltd. in respect of the fencing contract for the M4 Brynglas tunnels which was completed in May 1995. [18510]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter between Haycan Ltd. and the main contractor for the scheme.

Housing Development (Gelliwion)

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will examine the circumstances surrounding the decision by Taff Ely district council to proceed with a planning application to develop private housing on a greenfield site at Gelliwion, next to a listed site of special scientific interest, in Pontypridd. [18366]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has received requests to call in this planning application for his own determination. After careful consideration he has issued an article 14 direction. This prevents the local planning authority from granting planning permission, but does not prevent it continuing to process the application, or refusing planning permission. I will ensure that the hon. Member is informed of the final decision on call-in.

Town and Village Centres

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the measures proposed by the Welsh Office to revitalise town and village centres in Wales. [18368]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A wide range of existing Welsh Office measures, in conjunction with local authorities, development agencies and other bodies are being used to promote the regeneration of town and village centres in Wales. These measures include the strategic development scheme; urban investment grant; the programme for the valleys; the Wales tourist board's historic towns and resorts integrated development programme; the Land Authority for Wales; and the Welsh Development Agency's urban and rural development programmes.

The forthcoming White Paper for rural Wales represents a comprehensive review of the Government's policies as they affect life in rural Wales. Reflecting the responses to the extensive White Paper consultation exercise which has been undertaken, it will address the need to support communities, to encourage economic diversification and enterprise and to protect and conserve the Welsh countryside.

Landfill Tax

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the environmental impact in Wales of the proposed landfill tax; and if he will make a statement. [18369]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The landfill tax will contribute towards reducing the impact of waste on the environment by encouraging businesses and consumers to produce less waste and to recover value from more of the waste that is produced.

Housing Stock (Valleys)

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the measures proposed by the Welsh Office to underpin financially the improvement of existing housing stock in the south Wales valleys. [18370]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Around £85 million is being made available in 1996–97 for capital improvements to the housing stock in the south Wales valleys.

Energy Conservation

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures have been proposed by the Welsh Office to improve domestic energy conservation in Wales. [18371]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Domestic energy conservation can currently be improved under the renovation grant system and the home energy efficiency scheme. In 1997 Welsh councils will prepare energy conservation reports to meet the requirements of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

Antisocial Tenants

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to help local authorities in Wales deal with anti-social tenants. [18513]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Part V of the Housing Bill, which would apply to England and Wales, contains a number of such proposals including:

(a) giving councils a discretionary power to introduce a scheme of one year introductory tenancies allowing for quicker and easier repossession where new tenants behave irresponsibly;

(b) extending the grounds for possession to include nuisance or annoyance by anyone visiting or in the locality of a tenant's property;

(c) introducing a new ground for possession relating to domestic violence;

(d) allowing a power of arrest to be attached to injunctions where there is actual or threatened violence.

Farmers Charter

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he published his farmers charter; and how many copies have been distributed to farmers. [18876]

Mr. Hague: "Helping Farmers in Wales", the charter standard for farmers in Wales, was published on 5 October 1995. Approximately 7,300 copies have been issued through the offices of the Country Landowners' Association, the Farmers' Union of Wales, the National Farmers' Union and my Agriculture Department.

Health Promotion Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the guidelines to health authorities on the repatriation to them of funds hitherto allocated to the Health Promotion Authority for Wales; if such guidance will cover the impact of rental payments by the HPAW for its headquarters buildings on its *(a)* operating costs and *(b)* total costs in bidding for health promotion work from health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [18838]

Mr. Hague: My Department issued a circular letter (DGM(96)(12) on 30 January 1996, giving guidance to health authorities on the future arrangements for health promotion in Wales and the role of Health Promotion Wales. Copies of the letter have been placed in the Library of the House.

Health Promotion Wales will be expected to meet all of its costs through the contracts it secures with health authorities, the Welsh Office and other organisations.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list capital projects in excess of £0.5 million gross cost under consideration by Welsh training and enterprise councils in which some expenditure may be committed in the final quarter of the 1995–96 financial year. [18592]

Mr. Hague: There are no projects with a gross capital cost in excess of £0.5 million being considered by Welsh training and enterprise councils which will entail capital expenditure commitments during the last quarter of the current financial year.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the EU Commissioner responsible for regional development and his departmental officials concerning a review of objective 2 status in industrial south Wales. [18593]

Mr. Hague: I met Commissioner Wulf Mathia on 4 October 1995 when I discussed continued objective 2 status for industrial south Wales and the Government have made clear to the Commissioner that we see no case for changing the current UK objective map.

My officials, together with the partnerships, are already developing the new single programming document for industrial south Wales.

Emergency Medical Admissions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report,* column *498,* on emergency admissions and elective surgery, if he will place in the Library a copy of the emergency admissions action plan. [18623]

Mr. Hague: A copy of the outline action plan agreed by senior NHS representatives has been placed in the Library of the house. The action plan continues to be developed and I expect to receive a further report later this month.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, (1) pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report,* column *497,* if he will give the available figures since 31 March 1995 for the levels of unspent balances of general practitioner fundholders *(a)* broken down by family health service authority and *(b)* for Wales to the latest available date; [18626]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report,* column *498,* if he will list the figures indicating balances as at 31 December 1995; and what assessment he has made of how these figures related to business plans provided to his Department before the start of the financial year. [18629]

Mr. Hague: GP fundholder health plans are not submitted to the Department. It is for FHSAs in Wales to assess the plans against national and local priorities for improving health and health services.

Information on fundholder balances is shown in the annual accounts of family health services authorities. The Department does not collect this information during the financial year.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report,* column *496,* what assessment he has made of the impact of containing the total outturn expenditure figure on the Cardiff bay barrage project on completion of *(a)* the environmental island in the lake, *(b)* the announced number of water mixers, *(c)* the sea angling pier, *(d)* the combined rain and foul sewer outfalls to a standard of not more than three spills per summer, *(e)* three boat locks, and *(f)* the reduction of the lake water depth to 1.5 m; and if he will make a statement. [18627]

Mr. Hague: An assessment of these costs is an operational matter for the Cardiff Bay development corporation. I have asked the chief executive of the corporation to respond and will place a copy of that response in the Library of the House.

Hospital Trusts (Job Plans)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which Welsh NHS hospitals trusts have completed and agreed job plans for all their consultants. [18839]

Mr. Hague: This information is not held centrally. It is up to local management to ensure that consultants have an agreed job plan setting out their fixed commitments and other responsibilities.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *496*, which two non-executive directors of the South East Wales Ambulance trust have their terms of office expiring on 30 April. [18679]

Mr. Hague: The two non-executive directors whose terms of appointment expire on 30 April 1996 are Mr. Ian Gray and Mr. Brian John Webb. Information on all current public appointments is contained in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 5 March 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Cement Kilns

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *474*, if he will now contact other member states of the European Union to request information on the emission regulations applicable to cement plants burning secondary liquid fuels. [18549]

Mr. Clappison: Member states have already adopted a directive—94/67/EC—on the incineration of hazardous waste which will also apply to any other plant that burns such waste. Cement plants burning wastes will thus have to comply with the relevant provisions of this directive in all member states.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the Environment Agency has to carry out a detailed analysis of the precipitator dust from cement kilns which burn secondary liquid fuel, with particular reference to the potential of such dust to contaminate soil and groundwater. [18869]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency will require the operators to carry out appropriate analysis for all releases to air, water and land.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the Environment Agency has to issue guidance to cement kiln operators on meeting the requirements of the hazardous waste incineration directive. [18868]

Mr. Clappison: Chief inspector's guidance notes reflect the requirements of all relevant directives and will remain applicable in the Environment Agency.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the Environment Agency has to consider the overall environmental impact of the burning of secondary liquid fuel in cement kilns, including the deposition of kiln dust at landfill sites. [18870]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency will take into account the overall environmental impact of releases to air, water and land.

Domestic Premises (Commercial Use)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of domestic properties that are used for commercial purposes. [18501]

Mr. Clappison: The Department does not collect information on the number of domestic properties that are used for commercial premises.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if people who receive attendance allowance will be added to the list of those eligible for a 100 per cent. home energy efficiency scheme grant after 31 March. [18334]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Yes. We intend that householders over the age of 65 receiving attendance allowance should be able to claim full grants under the home energy efficiency scheme in the same way as householders receiving disability living allowance.

Industrial Processes (Pollution)

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Environment Agency's policy in relation to the continued authorisation of industrial processes operated by companies which have failed to implement solutions to pollution problems within the time scale agreed with the agency or with a predecessor authority. [18871]

Mr. Clappison: Without prejudice to its powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to vary an authorisation, the Environment Agency will require the operators to meet the conditions in their authorisations issued by it or its predecessor authorities.

Water Research Council

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the conclusions of the 1992 report from the Water Research Council. [18565]

Mr. Clappison: The report "Economics of Lead Pipe Replacement (TMU 9030)" giving the results of research funded by my Department and undertaken by the WRC has been publicly available since the work was completed in 1992. A copy was also placed in the Library of the House.

Derelict Buildings (Westminster Hospital)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of the derelict buildings of the former Westminster hospital. [18853]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. This is a matter for Westminster city council as local planning authority.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that proposed variations to authorisations granted under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 shall in all cases be subject to the same consultation procedures as apply in respect of new authorisations. [18872]

Mr. Clappison: There is no need to change the existing regulations—the Environmental Protection (Applications, Appeals and Registers) Regulations 1991—No. 507—which deal with consultation.

Pollution Abatement Measures

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers he has to require companies to

invest in pollution abatement measures in circumstances where savings accrue to such companies from the use of new fuels or processes which emit quantities of pollutants in excess of those emitted by the fuel or process which has been replaced. [18866]

Mr. Clappison: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution does not allow fuel or process changes that lead to a net adverse environmental effect. Any increased profitability due to fuel or process change is taken into account in assessing the operators' improvement programmes to meet new plant standards under the best available technology not entailing excessive cost criteria of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Internal Combustion Engines (Pollution)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in respect of each major toxic element the levels of pollution in the United Kingdom caused by all internal combustion driven transport for each of the years since 1970. [18874]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* I have taken major toxic element to refer to the heavy metals lead, cadmium, mercury, nickel, chromium, arsenic, copper, zinc, selenium and vanadium. The table shows the emissions of each of the above heavy metals due to fuel combustion from all road vehicles since 1970 expressed in tonnes per annum. The latest year for which data are available is 1993.

	Lead	*Cadmium*	*Mercury*	*Copper*	*Arsenic*	*Chromium*	*Vanadium*	*Nickel*	*Selenium*	*Zinc*
1970	6,557	10.93	0.00	52.59	0.00	7.12	0.00	34.80	0.96	96.340
1971	7,385	11.48	0.00	54.70	0.00	7.48	0.00	36.00	1.01	100.730
1972	7,992	12.19	0.00	56.71	0.00	7.95	0.00	36.84	1.06	105.760
1973	8,510	12.98	0.00	60.73	0.00	8.46	0.00	39.58	1.13	112.910
1974	8,053	12.64	0.00	59.19	0.00	8.24	0.00	38.58	1.10	109.990
1975	7,535	12.43	0.00	58.71	0.00	8.10	0.00	38.46	1.09	108.600
1976	7,689	12.94	0.00	60.29	0.00	8.44	0.00	39.19	1.12	112.350
1977	7,488	13.29	0.00	61.75	0.00	8.67	0.00	40.08	1.15	115.250
1978	7,400	14.06	0.00	64.39	0.00	9.34	0.00	42.66	1.24	123.710
1979	7,449	14.32	0.00	66.01	0.00	9.34	0.00	42.66	1.24	123.710
1980	7,625	14.65	0.00	65.70	0.00	9.57	0.00	41.77	1.25	124.995
1981	6,832	14.32	0.00	63.27	0.00	9.36	0.00	39.87	1.21	121.325
1982	6,953	14.72	0.00	65.20	0.00	9.62	0.00	41.14	1.25	124.890
1983	7,076	14.98	0.00	68.25	0.00	9.78	0.00	43.79	1.29	128.750
1984	7,322	15.51	0.00	72.55	0.00	10.11	0.00	47.27	1.35	134.910
1985	6,698	15.66	0.00	74.79	0.00	10.20	0.00	49.28	1.38	137.550
1986	3,059	16.50	0.00	80.84	0.00	10.74	0.00	54.00	1.47	146.680
1987	3,165	17.06	0.00	85.40	0.00	11.09	0.00	57.67	1.53	153.260
1988	3,294	17.91	0.00	92.22	0.00	11.62	0.00	63.16	1.63	163.100
1989	2,816	18.45	0.00	97.52	0.00	11.96	0.00	67.61	1.70	170.210
1990	2,399	18.77	0.00	101.13	0.00	12.16	0.00	70.74	1.75	174.820
1991	2,162	18.55	0.00	100.85	0.00	12.01	0.00	70.83	1.74	173.570
1992	1,960	18.59	0.00	103.30	0.00	12.02	0.00	73.25	1.76	175.880
1993	1,770	18.41	0.00	106.52	0.00	11.88	0.00	76.82	1.78	177.860

Emissions of Heavy Metals from road transport fuel combustion for the period 1970–1993 expressed in tonnes per annum.

Ocean Policies

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 29 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *737*, what consideration the workshop gave to the sustainability of the oceans, ocean science, linking science to management and global arrangements for ensuring effective implementation of ocean policies. [16814]

Mr. Clappison: The London international workshop on decision making on ocean issues, which was held on 30 November to 2 December 1995, considered the key pressures affecting the sustainability of the oceans. The conclusions dealt with possible changes to improve the effectiveness of the current international arrangements for obtaining scientific advice and formulating strategies and priorities for action. A copy of the workshop report has been placed in the Library.

Water Pollution (Nitrates)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the fiche d'impact prepared in connection with Council directive 91/676/EEC concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources. [18636]

Mr. Clappison: A copy of the explanatory memorandum was placed in the House of Commons Library at the time of the publication of the proposals for a directive. This did not contain a fiche d'impact.

Local Agenda 21

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual spending by his Department on Local Agenda 21 work; how much is distributed to local authorities; what allowance is made in standard spending assessments for Local Agenda 21 to each local authority; and if he will make a statement. [19067]

Mr. Clappison: In 1995–96, my Department is contributing up to £12,000 for local authorities to set up round table discussions with different groups interested in Local Agenda 21. It is also giving £20,554 to the local authority associations for the provision of guidance to local authorities on auditing sustainable development, and £25,000 for the development and promotion of the

eco-management and audit scheme for local government. Many of the projects funded by the Department's environmental action fund, which totals £4 million in 1995–96, also support Local Agenda 21. Standard spending assessments take account of the wide range of local authorities' spending, including Local Agenda 21 work, but do not include a specific element for such expenditure.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Local Government Commission's future programme of work; and if he will make a statement. [19550]

Mr. Curry: The Local Government Commission has today announced a programme for the next three years of periodic electoral reviews of district and county councils. We want the commission to give priority to those reviews which it has an independent duty to carry out, but we will direct it to carry out a small number of other reviews—of Southport in Merseyside and of the parish arrangements in four local authority areas: Milton Keynes, Hampshire, Surrey and the new unitary authority of the East Riding of Yorkshire.

Depending on our decisions on the recommendations for unitary authorities, which the commission made in its report of December 1995, we may also direct it to carry out electoral reviews of those areas in time for elections in May 1997.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what consultations he had with the Secretary to the Cabinet concerning the Government's response to the Scott inquiry; and where and when such consultations took place. [16600]

Mr. Newton *[holding answer 22 February 1996:]:* Successive Governments have not disclosed the nature of the specific sources of the advice they receive from the civil service.

Parliamentary Televising Operator

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress has been made towards the selection of an independent parliamentary televising operator for the five-year period from 1 August. [19078]

Mr. Newton: The Broadcasting Committees of both Houses have accepted the recommendation of a tender board, following a public tender process, that CCT Productions Ltd., the current operator, should be awarded the parliamentary televising contract for a further five-year period from 1 August 1996. The contract is formally between CCT Productions Ltd. and Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit Ltd.—PARBUL—and is subject to the successful negotiation of detailed terms by the parties. A copy of the tender submitted by CCT Productions Ltd. will be placed in the Library shortly, after the removal of any commercially sensitive information. The two Select Committees have also agreed the terms of new copyright licences required by PARBUL under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to cover the same five-year period as the operating contract with CCT Productions Ltd. The decision of the House of Commons Broadcasting Committee is in the form of a recommendation to Madam Speaker who, under the terms of the Act, exercises the House's function as owner of the copyright in its televised proceedings.

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee when he plans to make an announcement about the award of the cladding contract for the new parliamentary building. [17810]

Mr. Ray Powell: In accordance with the House's policy that the receipt of a contract may not be treated as a commercial endorsement of the successful company and that the contract should not be used in any promotional material, it is not the practice to make an announcement when contracts are awarded.

The placing of the fenestration contract for the new building is very much dependent on current negotiations, particularly on the willingness of the companies to accept the conditions of the contract. It is not possible therefore to forecast when this might be achieved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Murders

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many terrorist-related murders in Northern Ireland since 1969 have yet to result in prosecution. [17100]

Sir John Wheeler: Unfortunately, in the time available, it is not possible to answer this question. I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as the information is available and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Childless Couples

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which health boards provide NHS treatment for *(a)* assisted; and *(b)* surrogate pregnancy to childless couples; and if he will make a statement. [17967]

Mr. Moss: Health service treatment for assisted pregnancy is available to the residents of all health and social boards in Northern Ireland. Surrogate pregnancy, on the other hand, is not a matter for which boards have—or have sought—any provision.

Road Safety

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons he has not included in the Northern Ireland road safety plan the Local Authority Association's recommendation contained in its road safety code of practice, of a ratio of one road safety education officer per 50,000 of population; and how many road safety education officers there would be in Northern Ireland if this ratio were adopted. [18228]

Mr. Moss: Northern Ireland's road safety education officer service is a part of an integrated effort involving education, engineering and enforcement. Resources devoted to this effort are being increased considerably year-on-year.

Road safety instruction in schools in Northern Ireland is carried out by schools' own teaching staff, with the advice and guidance of road safety education officers, rather than directly by road safety education officers—as has been the practice throughout most of Great Britain. This substantially increases the effective output of road safety education in Northern Ireland. In view of the different arrangements for the delivery of road safety education, it was decided that this recommendation from the code of good practice was not appropriate.

Were the ratio advocated in the code to be adopted, 31 road safety education officers would be required.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the reasons for the reduction in the complement of road safety education officers from 1 April. [18227]

Mr. Moss: Funding for the road safety education officers service has been critically examined in the light of competing demands for resources throughout the Department of the Environment. As a result, the number of road safety education officers is to be reduced from 13 to 11 with effect from 1 April 1996.

While resources allocated to the road safety education officer service have been reduced, the service will continue to make a real and significant contribution to our drive to reduce the toll of deaths and injuries on our roads. The reductions should be seen against considerable increases in other areas of the Department's road safety effort such as engineering and enforcement.

Employment (Irish Nationals)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of people born in the Irish Republic who presently live, in and work, in Northern Ireland, broken down by gender, how many of each sex are employed in each sector of the economy; and how many are employed in each council area. [18223]

Sir John Wheeler: The 1991 census of population contains the most recent information on the breakdown of the resident population of Northern Ireland by country of birth, sector of the economy and place of employment. The information requested is as follows:

Population aged 16 years and over, born in the Republic of Ireland, in employment in Northern Ireland, by sex, by sector of the economy.

	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing		*Production*		*Construction*		*Services*		*Total*	
Place of employment	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Antrim	15	2	15	15	3	2	82	110	115	129
Ards	21	1	17	17	4	2	62	120	104	140
Armagh	25	1	18	16	9	3	142	193	194	213
Ballymena	9	–	18	12	6	2	62	84	95	98
Ballymoney	1	1	2	2	3	—	17	26	23	29
Banbridge	2	3	10	2	2	2	27	36	41	43
Belfast	—	1	99	42	29	7	863	1,180	991	1,230
Carrickfergus	—	1	9	3	1	1	19	44	29	49
Castlereagh	2	1	25	7	2	3	73	177	102	188
Coleraine	8	2	7	14	2	1	100	120	117	137
Cookstown	3	2	7	4	2	—	26	26	38	32
Craigavon	5	1	67	43	4	2	134	198	210	244
Derry	17	5	141	87	37	4	367	624	562	720
Down	5	3	12	7	3	1	90	126	110	137
Dungannon	21	3	30	14	6	1	76	121	133	139
Fermanagh	111	13	66	54	9	1	240	357	426	425
Larne	—	1	14	2	—	—	22	35	36	38
Limavady	5	1	7	5	1	—	33	47	46	53
Lisburn	13	1	22	10	10	5	124	161	169	177
Magherafelt	2	2	5	9	5	—	28	34	40	45
Moyle	3	2	2	4	1	—	10	24	16	30
Newry and Mourne	26	7	43	29	19	2	192	349	280	387
Newtownabbey	1	1	27	9	4	3	84	113	116	126
North Down	2	—	17	7	6	2	85	158	110	167
Omagh	38	7	15	12	9	—	109	191	171	210
Strabane	32	5	37	49	12	—	110	105	191	159

Civil Service

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken to ensure that senior posts in the Northern Ireland civil service are subject to open competition. [17896]

Sir John Wheeler: It is the policy of the Northern Ireland civil service, when filling senior posts, to consider the appropriateness of open competition for all posts. In 1995, more than 50 per cent. of senior posts were filled through open competition.

Tree Preservation Orders (Fines)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the maximum fine for cutting down a tree which has a tree preservation order *(a)* in Northern Ireland and *(b)* in England; and what plans he has to increase the fine in Northern Ireland. [18265]

Mr. Moss: In Northern Ireland, contravention of a tree preservation order can, on summary conviction, attract a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, which is currently £5,000. In England, the statutory maximum is

also level 5, or twice the sum which appears to the court to be the value of the tree, whichever is the greater. There are no plans to increase the maximum fine in Northern Ireland at present.

TREASURY

Reinvestment Relief

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to make the criteria for reinvestment relief more easily comprehensible. [17137]

Mr. Jack: The Inland Revenue is preparing a help sheet on investment relief as part of the work being done to assist taxpayers with their self-assessment returns. The Revenue is also exploring ways in which further help can be given in this area.

Statistics (Gender Breakdown)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to collect statistics broken down by gender where relevant. [17691]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* Statistics collected by the Central Statistical Office—CSO—are designed to improve decision making, stimulate research and inform debate within government and the wider community. Where it is relevant to this purpose to collect statistics broken down by gender, the CSO will consider doing so. For example, last year, to coincide with the world women's conference in Beijing, the CSO published "Social Focus on Women", which provided statistics on women from a wide variety of sources.

Statistics concerning staff employed in the Treasury are normally based on pay and personnel records, which include information on sex. Statistical information about personnel can therefore usually be broken down by sex.

Arms Exports

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information the Bank of England holds about the financing by British banks, using their customers' balances, of arms supplied to Iraq and Iran; which British banks were involved; what proportion of such financing went on the supply of Valmara 69 anti-personnel land mines; and if he will make a statement. [17973]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* To the best of its knowledge, the Bank of England holds no information about the financing by British banks of exports of lethal equipment, including anti-personnel land mines, to Iraq or Iran.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *156*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the memorandum of understanding between the US and United Kingdom of 6 July 1989 on customs co-operation. [18532]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Gambling (Taxation)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instigate a review of the level of taxation on different forms of gambling. [18477]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The levels of taxation on different forms of gambling are considered annually by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in reaching his Budget judgment.

Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the suitability of using the waste classification system proposed by the Department of the Environment to allocate particular waste streams to the different landfill tax bands. [19139]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Two hundred and twenty-four representations were received in response to Customs and Excise's recent consultation exercise on scope of the lower rate of landfill tax. These are being analysed and the findings will be submitted to Ministers shortly.

Customs consulted on a proposal that all wastes falling within category 1, the inactive category, of the Department of the Environment's national waste classification scheme should be liable to the lower rate of landfill tax. Nevertheless, there are wastes currently listed in other categories of the scheme where the risk of pollution is minimal. We will consider such cases in the light of the replies to the consultation exercise. An announcement will be made in due course and the order containing the list of items to be included in the lower rate will be laid during the summer.

Barlow Clowes

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action has been taken by his Department to improve the regulation of the financial industry since the publication of his Department's inquiry into the Barlow Clowes financial fraud case. [18322]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Department of Trade and Industry inspectors' report was published in July 1995, but the Government did not wait until then to address the regulatory issues raised by the Barlow Clowes case. Barlow Clowes operated under the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958. The deficiencies of that regulatory regime were recognised when it was replace by the Financial Services Act—FSA—1986. The introduction of the FSA saw an improvement in investor protection: it raised requirements for authorisation and widened the categories of business for which firms required authorisation. Following the review in May 1993 by Andrew Large of the role and functions of the Securities and Investments Board, greater emphasis was given to investor protection by using all the available enforcement powers. More recent developments, such as the new training and competence regime, have also played their part. As a consequence of these changes, the additional protections suggested by the report have, where appropriate, already been made available.

Post Office (External Financing Limit)

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the formula used by the Treasury to determine the Post Office external financing limit. [18847]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Post Office external financing limit is set, as part of the annual public expenditure survey, at a level which reflects an appropriate balance between the needs of the Post Office's business and its ability to contribute to public finances.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of staff employed in the home civil service are *(a)* women, *(b)* people of ethnic minority origin and *(c)* disabled people. [19445]

Mr. Freeman: I have published today the second in a series of annual data summaries on equal opportunities in the civil service. The Government are committed to equality of opportunity for all people. Figures show improvements in the representation of women and members of ethnic minorities and, for the first time, include information on registered and non-registered disabled staff. Copies of the data summary have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

"Getting a Good Deal in Europe"

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what arrangements he has introduced to monitor the implementation of the guidance contained in the booklet "Getting a Good Deal in Europe". [18633]

Mr. Freeman: Departmental Ministers are responsible for ensuring that the guidance in the booklet "Getting a Good Deal in Europe" is applied in their Departments.

Capita Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list all those *(a)* facilities management consortiums, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buyout consortiums, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market testing schemes in each Department in respect of which the Capita Group is currently involved in bidding. [19177]

Mr. Freeman: There are none in the Cabinet Office. Information about other Departments is not held centrally.

Civil Service Pensions

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on discussions held between his Department and that of the Paymaster General regarding the impact of the prior options review of Paymaster on the administration and payment of civil service pensions. [19055]

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General announced on 4 December 1995 the start of a prior options review of the Paymaster agency, with a focus on options for moving the agency into the private sector.

The agency provides pensioner payroll and associated services for the civil service pension scheme. A market test of these services had been announced earlier by my Department. Discussions taking place between the Departments concerned are directed at securing early savings for my Department without prejudice to any future move of the agency into the private sector.

DEFENCE

Bosnia

12. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to visit Bosnia to inspect British troops; and if he will make a statement. [16849]

Mr. Portillo: I regularly visit British troops in the former Yugoslavia and was last there in December. I hope to make another visit in the spring.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the logistic plan to establish and support the implementation force with particular reference to the prices which IFOR is paying for essential services. [18616]

Mr. Soames: It is not possible to assess separately the costs of the logistic support to IFOR. Logistics costs are, however, included in the total estimated cost which is currently in the region of £300 million.

The prices which are being paid for essential services used by the UK forces contributing to IFOR are consistent with market prices. Wherever possible, we seek savings through competition, buying in bulk and exemption from taxes under the status of forces agreement.

International Peacekeeping

13. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect on Britain's contribution to international peacekeeping operations of reducing United Kingdom defence spending to the European average. [16850]

Mr. Portillo: If any Government were to reduce spending to the European average of 2.3 per cent. of gross domestic product, they would be forced to cut spending on defence by as much as £4.5 billion. This would severely undermine our capacity to undertake operations of any kind.

Defence Industry

14. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British jobs are sustained by the defence industry; and if he will make a statement. [16851]

16. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the level of employment in the defence industry in the United Kingdom. [16855]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The most recent figures available are for 1993–94, when an estimated 395,000 UK jobs depend on defence expenditure. About 80 per cent. of these—315,000—were sustained by my Department's spending, on both equipment and non-equipment items; the other 20 per cent.—80,000—depended on defence exports.

Home Ownership

15. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has in respect of home ownership among younger service personnel following the publication of the Bett report. [16852]

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement announced on 1 March, *Official Report*, columns *766–67*, a replacement for the married quarters discount sales scheme, which will end following the proposed sale of the married quarters estate. The new long service advance of pay scheme provides an interest-free loan and will promote home ownership more widely in the services.

Interoperable Equipment

17. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if future orders for new or replacement equipment will be interoperable with NATO partners' equipment. [16856]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Interoperability with the equipment of our NATO partners is an important consideration in our assessment of the procurement options for meeting the equipment needs of our armed forces.

Low Flying

18. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on possible damage to children's hearing caused by low-flying aircraft. [16857]

Mr. Soames: My Department has not conducted specific research into the subject. We do, however, closely monitor and evaluate scientific research on noise and hearing, including that relating to possible hearing loss in children due to aircraft noise. We believe that the restrictions we place on heights, speeds and operating procedures of military aircraft should ensure that the level of noise experienced on the ground is not harmful, particularly given the brief exposure involved.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy over low training flights taking place over cities and towns. [18859]

Mr. Soames: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 10 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *463*.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons two RAF fighter aircraft were allowed to fly fast and low over central London at 10.57 am on 28 February and four more at 12.30 pm on the same day; and if he will make a statement. [18858]

Mr. Soames: The RAF Tornado GR1 aircraft were authorised to perform low-level flypasts of St. Paul's cathedral as part of the ceremony and service to mark the unveiling by HM the Queen of a memorial commemorating British service men who died in the Gulf war.

Army Training Regiment

19. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the operation of the Army Training Regiment. [16858]

Mr. Soames: The Army Training Regiment, Lichfield is one of five such regiments providing initial training to Army recruits. The regiment at Lichfield trains recruits for the Army Medical Services, the Parachute Regiment and the Prince of Wales Division of Infantry.

The initial training provided at the Army training regiments is designed to meet the Army's requirements in a progressive and professional way which recognises the abilities of recruits on entry. All recruits at the Army training regiment are trained to the high uniform standard laid down in the 10-weeks common military syllabus (recruits) prior to undertaking phase 2 (special to arm) training at the appropriate phase 2 training centre.

Type 23 Frigate

20. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received on the time scale for orders for the type 23 frigate. [16859]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 21 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *165*.

RAF Valley

21. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on the award of the contract following the market-testing exercise carried out at RAF Valley. [16860]

Mr. Soames: Tenders for the maintenance work at RAF Valley are currently being evaluated. I expect to be in a position to announce the award of the contract in April.

Dual-use Technology

22. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to strengthen the controls over nuclear and related dual-use technology. [16861]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Nuclear and related dual-use technology is controlled under an EC Council regulation and in UK implementing regulations, under the Dual Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulations 1995. The control list is amended when necessary to reflect changes agreed in the relevant non-proliferation regimes.

Recruitment

23. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what improvements he plans in recruiting procedures for new members of the armed services. [16862]

Mr. Soames: The most important new procedure introduced on 10 January is that of the use of jobcentres for armed forces recruiting. I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave on 9 January, *Official Report*, column 5.

A number of other new improvements to recruiting procedures have been introduced or will be introduced in the next few months. These include a new armed forces eligibility questionnaire which allows candidates to see at

a glance if they are eligible for entry into the armed forces and the introduction later this year of a standard application form for use by all three services.

In recognition of the reduced physical fitness of some young people, a physical development course is being trialled at the Army Training Regiment, Glencorse. The aim of this course is to take borderline physical fitness failures from the recruit selection centres and offer them a progressive three-week physical fitness programme to bring them up to the required entry standards.

The armed forces are also in the process of developing new formal links with the career service to help produce a wide network of well-informed careers advisers to help promote careers in the armed forces.

Arms Sales (Information)

24. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further steps he is taking to provide Parliament with greater access to information on arms sales; and if he will make a statement. [16863]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 26 February, *Official Report*, columns *589–604*.

Procurement

25. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of Ministry of Defence defence equipment is procured in the United Kingdom and in Europe. [16864]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The "Statement of Defence Estimates 1995", chapter 5, figure 13, provides a breakdown of the proportion of equipment expenditure in the UK, overseas and on collaborative projects over the last five years. This indicates that, including the UK share of collaborative work, 91 per cent. by value of our direct equipment expenditure is placed with UK industry, and 9 per cent. overseas. The Department does not compile the data to break this figure for overseas expenditure down by individual countries.

Europe

26. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans next to meet his French counterpart to discuss the future defence of Europe. [16865]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets his French counterpart on a regular basis and they discuss a wide range of European security and other issues.

Land Mines

27. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with representatives from the United Nations concerning the UN Secretary-General's call for a ban on the export of anti-personnel land mines. [16866]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend has had no discussions on this issue with representatives of the United Nations.

Joint Service Command and Staff College

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his plans for the provision of a joint service command and staff college; and if he will make a statement. [19446]

Mr. Soames: Further to the answer I gave the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) on 6 February, *Official Report*, column *169*, we have now completed our appraisal of the options for staff training from September 1997 until the opening of the permanent site of the joint service command and staff college.

RAF Bracknell, Queen Elizabeth Park barracks Guildford, and the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst were examined as possible temporary sites for the new college.

We have chosen RAF Bracknell and propose, subject to formal consultation, to open the new joint service command and staff college there in September 1997. The consultation document is available in the Library of the House.

The Government intend to dispose of the Bracknell site by the end of 1999, by which time the new college should be well established at its permanent site.

Condor Missile Programme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the threat posed to UK interests by the Condor missile programme; which countries have participated in it; and whether missiles developed in respect of the programme are still in position. [17208]

Mr. Soames: While we remain extremely vigilant to the potential for ballistic missile technology proliferation, we do not consider Condor II to be a threat to UK interests. The Condor II ballistic missile programme developed by Argentina in partnership with a number of European technical consultants in the 1980s, was deactivated in May 1991 when Argentina acceded to the missile technology control regime. Although both Egypt and Iraq were customers for Condor missile technology and associated production facilities, we do not believe that Condor was ever flight tested or deployed anywhere in the world.

RAF Chivenor (Iraqi Pilots)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Iraqi pilots were trained at RAF Chivenor during the 1980s. [17717]

Mr. Soames: From 1980 until 1986, a number of Iraqi pilots received training at Ministry of Defence establishments; none received weapons training or training in combat techniques. Full details of students trained at individual establishments are not available.

Asbestos-related Conditions

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel or former personnel have been awarded war pensions for asbestos-related conditions resulting from their service *(a)* between 1967 and 1987 and *(b)* since 1987; and how many of those in *(b)* were also awarded compensation. [18168]

Mr. Soames: No compensation payments have been made to service or ex-service personnel for asbestos-related conditions under my Department's common law liability. War pensions are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's civilian employees or former employees have been awarded compensation for asbestos-related conditions resulting from their service *(a)* between 1967 and 1987 and *(b)* since 1987. [18167]

Mr. Soames: I will write to my right hon. Friend.

Married Quarters Estate

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the increases in rents for service family quarters in each of the last five years; and what are the planned increases. [18253]

Mr. Soames: The average percentage increases in accommodation charges recommended by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body for service family quarters owned by the Ministry of Defence are given.

1992–93: 3.9–9.2 per cent.

1993–94: 1.5 per cent.

1994–95: 5 per cent.

1995–96: 5–8 per cent.

1996–97: 10–25 per cent.

Charges are recommended annually by the AFPRB, who have always followed the principle that charges levied on service personnel should compare fairly with the costs civilians have to incur for comparable housing. The AFPRB acknowledged this year that family quarter charges had slipped significantly behind comparable rents in the private sector and as such had recommended a significant increase in charges. It sees this as the beginning of a number of increases over the forthcoming years to close the gap, but these are not expected to be of the same magnitude as those recommended this year. The higher percentage increases have been applied to senior officers, while increases for junior personnel have generally been in the region of 10 per cent.

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his written answer to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *320*, if he will place a copy of the information memorandum in the Library. [18944]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As I explained in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), the information memorandum has been issued to prequalified bidders on a commercially confidential basis. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to place a copy in the Library of the House.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions taken at the meetings held between Ministers and officials in his Department and US congressman Steve Buyer on Gulf war-related illnesses. [18551]

Mr. Soames: Constructive meetings were held with Congressman Buyer and a range of issues were discussed. In particular, Congressman Buyer was given a progress report on the findings to date of our Gulf medical assessment programme and was advised of our plans for a series of Gulf-related epidemiological studies. Congressman Buyer was also assured of our intention to maintain close liaison with the US authorities investigating Gulf war illnesses.

RAF Aircraft Crashes

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current provisions governing the publication of investigations into crashes of RAF aircraft. [18491]

Mr. Soames: A military aircraft accident summary, outlining the circumstances and cause of each RAF aircraft accident, together with any significant flight safety lessons learnt, is published when the board of inquiry has been completed and, when there has been a fatality, after next of kin have been made aware of the inquiry's findings. Copies of the MAAS are sent to the hon. Members in whose constituency the accident occurred as well as to those in whose constituency the aircraft involved was based. Copies are also placed in the Library of the House and published in the specialist press. This arrangement applies equally to Royal Navy aircraft accidents.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provisions exist for *(a)* the payment of compensation for the *(b)* awards in recognition of gallantry, shown by RAF personnel who have died while directing a crashing aircraft away from populated areas. [18492]

Mr. Soames: Compensation would be paid in accordance with common law principles to dependants of service personnel whose death resulted from negligence on the part of the Ministry of Defence or someone acting on its behalf. If the fatal accident had been caused by the negligence of members of the aircrew, dependants of those who had been negligent would not receive compensation.

Where RAF personnel die in service and are members of the armed forces pension scheme, benefits are payable either to their dependants or to the estate of the deceased. In addition, where the cause of death is accepted as attributable to service, additional benefits will be paid even if the person had opted out of the AFPS and had made their own personal pension arrangements. These additional benefits would include a tax-free war widow's pension, where appropriate, under the scheme operated by the Department of Social Security.

The Air Force cross and Queen's commendation for bravery in the air are available to recognise acts of non-combatant gallantry by RAF personnel while flying. Higher levels of gallantry in the air may be recognised by the George cross or George medal. Each may be awarded posthumously. Recommendations for these awards are made by commanding officers when appropriate.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the crash of a Harrier at Burnworthy, Somerset; and what measures he is taking *(a)* to avert crashes of RAF aircraft and *(b)* to improve training instructions to avert casualties to (i) RAF personnel and (ii) civilians on the ground. [18490]

Mr. Soames: Investigations into all the aircraft accidents that have occurred this year, including the accident involving a Royal Navy Harrier T4 in my hon. Friend's constituency on 23 February, are still continuing. Action will be taken to ensure any flight safety lessons are communicated widely within my Department as soon as they become apparent. All aircrew must reach specified professional standards before they are permitted to take part in any military flying activity. There is no question that either the RAF or the Royal Navy would ever jeopardise the safety of its aircrew or civilians on the ground by allowing inadequately trained personnel to fly an aircraft.

RAF Northolt

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase *(a)* the size and capacity of RAF Northolt and *(b)* the number of flights into and out of that airport; and if he will make a statement. [18341]

Mr. Soames: Following the rejection of the proposal to create a civil enclave at RAF Northolt, the Government have consulted further with the business aviation industry to identify working arrangements at RAF Northolt which could improve the service offered to civil users and to business in the south-east more generally. Such arrangements could result in some limited increase in non-MOD use of RAF Northolt, but my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence and my noble Friend Viscount Goschen will of course take into account the views of local communities and other interested parties before any final decisions are made.

Armed Forces Pensions Scheme

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the probable cost of making payments under the armed forces pensions scheme to the widows of service men who retired before 6 April 1978, and subsequently remarried. [18333]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no record of the number of marriages which were contracted before 1978 by former service men after their retirement, and it is not possible, therefore, to provide an accurate estimate of the cost of awarding pensions to their widows from these marriages. In broad terms, however, my Department has assessed that the final cost of recognising all service prior to 1978 in the case of post-retirement marriages could amount to about £60 million in total for the armed forces.

Empty RAF Stations

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the empty RAF stations in the United Kingdom and the acreage covered by such stations. [18294]

Mr. Soames: The following RAF stations are in the course of disposal:

	Acres
RAF Greenham Common	1,029
RAF Upper Heywood	1,250
RAF Elvington	400
RAF Bentwaters	1,042
RAF West Raynham	685
RAF Swinderby	628
RAF Binbrook	576
RAF Medmenham	35
Former RAF Kenley	15
RAF Kemble	500
Former RAF Burtonwood	136
RAF Alconbury (enclave retained)	1,050

Additionally, there are a number of other stations currently under consideration for alternative defence use and which may ultimately be passed for disposal, and others where some land is surplus to requirements and is either in disposal or may be passed for disposal.

Finningley Airport

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the bid by Virgin to operate Finningley airport was refused. [18824]

Mr. Soames: No formal bid has been received by my Department from Virgin Airways in regard to RAF Finningley.

Eurofighter

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aircraft he plans to purchase as an interim measure before the Eurofighter enters service. [19099]

Mr. Arbuthnot: None.

Korean War (British Prisoners)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, columns 129–30, what communication he has had on the issue of the possibility of Korean war British prisoners-of-war being still held in Russian camps, with Mr. Malcolm Mackintosh CMG, formerly senior fellow in Soviet studies at the Institute of Strategic Studies; and if he will make a statement. [17032]

Mr. Soames: My officials have discussed the subject with Mr. Mackintosh. If any new information emerges, we will of course pursue it.

Changing the Guard (Buckingham Palace)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many changing the guard ceremonies there have been outside Buckingham palace in each of the past three years; at what cost in 1996 prices; what was the average number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women on parade in each case; and if he will make a statement. [17170]

Mr. Soames: There were 236 changing the guard ceremonies outside Buckingham palace in 1993, 245 in 1994 and 247 in 1995. Of the 142 service personnel involved in the ceremony, 60 are engaged in the provision of music. The bands sometimes include female personnel, but a record of the specific numbers on specific occasions is not maintained.

The provision of personnel for the changing of the guard ceremonies does not incur additional manpower costs. Details of travel, food and accommodation costs are not held separately and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Troop Deployment

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the level of troop deployment in each of the spheres of operation. [16843]

Mr. Soames: Operational deployment of UK forces is kept under constant review to ensure that the levels match the requirements at any time. At present, there are some 17,500 service personnel deployed in Northern Ireland, 12,700 deployed in support of implementation force operations in the former Yugoslavia and about 400 more on operations in support of United Nations Security Council resolutions in Iraq. In addition, over 400 personnel are committed to UN operations in Cyprus, Kuwait, Angola and Georgia.

RAF Aircraft Losses

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the numbers, *(b)* the total cost and *(c)* the known causes of all training and operational RAF aircraft lost during (i) 1992, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995. [18846]

Mr. Soames: The number of RAF aircraft either substantially damaged or destroyed in air accidents in the years in question are as follows:

Year	*Number*
(i) 1992	9
(ii) 1993	9
(iii) 1994	8
(iv) 1995	8

Each accident is most thoroughly investigated by separate RAF boards of inquiry. Summaries of BOI findings, including accident cause and flight safety recommendations, are routinely place in the Library of the House. No additional costs are incurred for the replacement of aircraft lost in accidents since replacements are drawn from an attrition reserve, which is procured as part of the total aircraft requirement to offset predicted losses. The cost of this reserve is therefore borne when the fleet is procured, not when an aircraft is transferred from the reserve.

Iraq and Turkey (British Troops)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total British military presence in northern Iraq and in southern Turkey; and what forecasts he has made of the future presence. [19056]

Mr. Soames: The British contribution to the enforcement of the no-fly zone over northern Iraq is six Tornado GR1 and one VC10 aircraft supported by some 150 military personnel based in southern Turkey; there is also a small number of military personnel based at Zakho in northern Iraq. We have no current plans to alter this contribution.

RAF Air Defence Capabilities

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he intends to take to improve the RAF air defence capabilities into the next century. [19064]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In order to improve our air defence capability pending the introduction of Eurofighter, we have decided that, subject to the agreement of satisfactory contractual terms and conditions, a contract will be placed with British Aerospace to upgrade the RAF's Tornado F3 aircraft to make them capable of carrying advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles and advanced short-range air-to-air missiles.

Together with the radar improvements and joint tactical information distribution system with which the aircraft is already being equipped, this upgrade will greatly enhance the capability of the Tornado F3 and provide the Royal Air Force with an up-to-date beyond visual range missile capability. The overall programme is expected to cost £125 million.

Procurement Executive Headquarters

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the construction costs of his Department's procurement executive at Abbey Wood. [16853]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The outturn costs for the construction of Abbey Wood are estimated to be £247.2 million at 1992 prices—£273.3 million at 1995 prices—against the approved budget of £248.5 million at 1992 prices—£273.4 million at 1995 prices. The project is therefore within budget.

Overseas Armed Forces (Training)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries members of whose armed forces were designated as civil or Government servants with his Department's knowledge or consent during periods in the United Kingdom since 1980. [16400]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I will write to the hon. Member.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base and which *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public; and whether in each case this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntarily. [16027]

Mr. Boswell: The information required is as follows:

(a) The regional flood defence committees are required to admit the public to their meetings under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 by virtue of paragraph 28 of schedule 25 to the Water Act 1989. This information, which is currently being included in the Environment Act 1995 (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 1996, was unfortunately omitted from the answer given to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood on 1 May 1995, *Official Report*, columns *78–79*.

(b) None of the other executive non-departmental public bodies, for which my right hon. Friend is responsible, has a statutory requirement to admit members of the public to board or committee meetings or to hold open meetings for the public.

(c) However, the following arrangements are operated on a voluntary basis:

Open meetings are held by the NRA to inform and consult local interests on particular flood defence interests.

The Home-Grown Cereals Authority holds no formal open meetings but does hold meetings and events where the public are welcomed.

The Meat and Livestock Commission holds open levy-payer meetings which may be attended by members of the public.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation b the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [16019]

Mr. Boswell: The information required is as follows:

SUBJECT TO:

(a) Investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner

Agricultural Wages Committees.

(b) Scrutiny by the Audit Commission

None.

(c) Scrutiny by the National Audit Office

Wine Standards Board of the Vintners company

Agricultural Wages Committees

Agricultural Wages Board

Regional Flood Defence Committees

Food from Britain

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Horticulture Research International

UK Register of Organic Foods

National Audit Office access rights to the other bodies are as follows:

Home-Grown Cereals Authority (in respect of publicly voted money)

Meat and Livestock Commission (in respect of agency work)

Horticultural Development Council (arrangements are under review)

Apple and Pear Research Council (arrangements are under review).

(d) Statutory Provisions for Open Government

There are no statutory provisions for Open Government.

(e) Performance Indicators

Wine Standards Board of the Vintners Company

Home-Grown Cereals Authority

Food from Britain

Meat and Livestock Commission

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Horticulture Research International

Agricultural Wages Committees

UK Register of Organic Foods

Horticultural Development Council (to appear in next annual report)

Milk Development Council (new body-Performance Indicators being finalised)

Discussions are in progress with Apple and Pear Research Council.

(f) Provisions under the Citizen Charter

The following NDPBs have produced or are producing service statements

Wine Standards Board of the Vintners Company

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Horticulture Research International

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Home-Grown Cereals Authority

Agricultural Wages Board

Agricultural Wages Committees

UK Register of Organic Food Standards

Milk Development Council.

Food from Britain although not participating in the chartermark scheme, meets the required standards.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests, indicating in each case if this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [16820]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* The annual reports and accounts of the following executive non-departmental public bodies, for which my right hon. Friend is responsible, are published:

Apple and Pear Research Council

Food from Britain

Home-Grown Cereals Authority

Wine Standards Board of the Vintners' Company

Horticultural Development Council

Horticulture Research Commission

Meat and Livestock Commission

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Sea Fish Industry Authority.

Legislation requires, in each case, that the annual report and accounts are published.

Minutes and agendas of executive non-departmental public bodies' meetings are not published. There is no statutory requirement to do so.

None of the executive non-departmental public bodies publishes a register of members' interests. There is no statutory requirement for such a register. However, details of those filling many posts are published or are available at the time of appointment. The Home-Grown Cereals Authority has drawn up a register of interests of authority members which is available for public inspection at the HGCA's offices.

Horse and Pony Exports

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to increase the minimum values on the export of horses and ponies; and if he will make a statement. [16237]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* I have no such plans.

EDS Ltd.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those contracts his Department currently holds with EDS, indicating for each the *(a)* date of inception, *(b)* value and *(c)* duration. [17449]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry currently holds no contracts with EDS. Consequently, there are no dates, values or durations to report.

Zoonoses Diseases

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases have been brought to court in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EU countries for non-compliance with directive 92/117. [17180]

Mrs. Browning: Directive 92/117 requires member states to collect information on outbreaks of specified zoonoses in humans and animals and provide an annual report to the Commission on the trends and sources of the zoonotic infections recorded during the previous year. The directive also requires member states to establish measures for the testing of breeding flocks of domestic fowl numbering 250 or more birds for salmonella enteritidis or salmonella typhimurium. The requirements for testing breeding flocks are implemented in Great Britain by the Poultry Breeding Flocks and Hatcheries Order 1993 and in Northern Ireland by the Poultry Breeding Flocks and Hatcheries Scheme Order Northern Ireland 1994. Three prosecutions have so far been taken under the Great Britain order for non-compliance with its requirements. No prosecutions have been taken in Northern Ireland. The Department does not collect information on prosecutions taken in other member states.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recommendations Her Majesty's Government *(a)* have made and *(b)* will be making regarding the review of EC directive 92/117. [17177]

Mrs. Browning: A Commission proposal for a review of directive 92/117 is under discussion by member states in Brussels but has not yet been agreed. The Government believe, however, that the control of Salmonella enteritidis and salmonella typhimurium in breeding flocks of domestic fowl is an essential element in any programme aimed at the control of these serotypes in production flocks. The Commission is familiar with the United Kingdom's views.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what penalties there are in other EU countries for failure to comply with directive 92/117. [17181]

Mrs. Browning: The Department has not seen the implementation measures submitted to the EC Commission by other member states and has no information on the penalties they are applying or wish to apply in respect of the requirements set out in directive 92/117.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many successful prosecutions have been brought under order implementing directive 92/117 in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EU countries. [17179]

Mrs. Browning: Three successful prosecutions have been brought in Great Britain under the Poultry Breeding Flocks and Hatcheries Order 1993. The Department does not collect information on prosecutions taken in other member states.

North-east Drift Net Fishery

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent correspondence he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority about the north-east drift net fishery. [17256]

Mr. Baldry: I refer to my reply to the right hon. Member of Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 22 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *270–71*. I have since received a further letter from the chairman of the National Rivers Authority suggesting discussions between officials in the authority, the Ministry and the Scottish authorities on measures to safeguard future stock of spring fish, and these will be arranged.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how much was charged to exporters for each consignment of livestock destined for export certified by his own veterinary and technical assistant staff between 13 and 19 February, inclusive; [17846]

(2) what sums his Department has received for providing a health certification service for livestock destined for export between 13 and 19 February, inclusive. [17724]

Mrs. Browning: Invoices have not yet been raised for these services. No money has been received.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will announce the results of his inquiry into inadequate certification by veterinary surgeons. [17788]

Mrs. Browning: Inquiries are continuing concerning the allegations made in the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme and I can give no indication as to when they may be completed.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were deemed unfit to travel between 13 February and 19 February, inclusive, by the Minister's veterinary staff when undertaking certification procedures of live animals destined for export. [17778]

Mrs. Browning: Between 13 to 19 February, of the 2,691 sheep and 3,843 calves presented for export, 39 sheep and 165 calves were deemed unfit to travel by veterinary staff while undertaking certification procedures.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many veterinary staff and technical assistant staff were deployed to undertake certification for animals destined for export between 13 and 16 February, inclusive. [17723]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Glandford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 20 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *136–37*, and on 26 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *381–82*.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if all local veterinary inspectors are employed by his Ministry when undertaking health certification work for animals due to be exported from the United Kingdom. [17711]

Mrs. Browning: LVIs are appointed by the Minister to act as agents on his behalf. They are not employees.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how long certification took for each consignment of live animals destined for export between 13 and 19 February, inclusive, for *(a)* physical examinations and *(b)* related administrative procedures. [17725]

Mrs. Browning: The nature of the work is such that it is not possible to separate the physical examinations from the administrative procedures, for example, checking identities of animals. Set out in the table are the times taken at the various lairages on different days when one or more consignments were dealt with at each lairage.

Date	*Number of consignments*	*Start time*	*Finish time*
13 February	2 consignments of sheep 1 consignment of calves	0900	1300
	3 consignments of sheep 1 consignment of calves	0900	1430
	5 consignments of calves	0900	[1]0130
14 February	1 consignment of sheep 3 consignments of calves	0830	1700
	5 consignments of calves	0730	1330
15 February	1 consignment of sheep	0830	1015
	7 consignments of calves	0800	1430
	6 consignments of calves	0730	1630
16 February	1 consignment of sheep 2 consignments of calves	0730	1230

[1] 14 February.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the rate per hour charged by *(a)* his veterinary staff and *(b)* his technical assistance staff to certify consignments of animals destined for export between 13 and 19 February, inclusive. [17721]

Mrs. Browning: For veterinary officers, the rate per hour is £41.61 per hour and for animal health officers, it is £23.47 per hour exclusive of VAT.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many consignments of animals for export were certified by the Minister's veterinary and technical staff between 13 and 16 February, inclusive. [17712]

Mrs. Browning: Between 13 and 16 February inclusive, Ministry veterinary staff certified eight consignments of sheep and 30 consignments of calves.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the use of a separate fitness to travel certificate ceased for the purposes of certifying animals for export. [17726]

Mrs. Browning: The use of a separate fitness to travel certificate ceased from 31 December 1992.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were in each consignment certified for export by his veterinary and technical staff between 13 and 19 February, inclusive. [17722]

Mrs. Browning: The number of animals in each consignment certified for export by Ministry veterinary staff between 13 and 19 February, inclusive, was as follows:

Date	*Number of consignments*	*Animals per consignment*
13 February	5 consignment of sheep	204, 426, 400, 389, 386
	7 consignment of calves	88, 88, 203, 53, 51, 229, 110
14 February	1 consignment of sheep	405
	8 consignment of calves	146, 62, 268, 160, 53, 179, 229, 68
15 February	1 consignment of sheep	231
	13 consignments of calves	126, 80, 168, 138, 241, 206, 40, 262, 196, 16, 29, 59, 90
16 February	1 consignment of sheep	250
	2 consignments of calves	65, 140

No animals were certified for export by Ministry veterinary and technical staff on 17, 18 or 19 February.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current role of Jonathan Stirling in respect of animal health certification on behalf of exporters. [17866]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Glandford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 22 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *269–70*.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which serving civil servants in his Department are presently directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18153]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* A number of officials in the Department have declared their outside interests in accordance with departmental requirements. As with all employment matters, individuals' details are a confidential matter between them and their employer.

The following staff currently hold directorships under the guide to non-executive directorships for civil servants:

Mr. R. A. Hathaway: Manor Bakeries Ltd.

Mr. R. G. Purnell: H. R. Wallingford

Mr. A. R. Burne: The Albert Fisher Group plc

Mr. B. J. Harding: Cadbury Ltd.

The individuals concerned do not receive payment.

Organic Aid Scheme

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money has been received by farmers in the form of organic aid since September 1994; and if he will make a statement on proposals for encouraging greater participation. [18305]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* Since the start of the organic aid scheme in England in August 1994 until the end of December 1995, £190,733 has been paid. Separate schemes operate in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We are considering a number of options for encouraging greater uptake of the scheme.

Cassava Chips

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with Commonwealth countries as to the possible importation of cassava chips; and if he will make a statement. [18481]

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend has not held discussions on imports of this product with any Commonwealth countries. Various preferential quotas exist which facilitate imports of cassava—manioc—into the EU from third countries in which members of the Commonwealth are free to participate.

Tractors and Agricultural Trailers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what safety guidelines govern the use of tractors and agricultural trailers; and what penalties exist for those who fail to adhere to these guidelines. [18430]

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

The regulations governing the use of agricultural vehicles and their trailers on the road are the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, as amended, unless they are specifically provided for under the Motor Vehicles (Authorisation of Special Types) General Order 1979, as amended, as well as the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989, as amended.

The maximum penalty on conviction of an offence under these regulations of dangerous driving is currently a fine of £5,000 and disqualification. The Road Traffic Act 1991 allows the maximum penalty for causing death by driving, on conviction, could be five years' imprisonment.

The use of agricultural vehicles and machines off road is covered by the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974. Under these regulations, the penalty for an offence can, dependant upon its gravity, be a maximum of £20,000 if it is heard in a magistrates court or an unlimited fine if it is heard in a high court.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Hall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a list of all overseas visits made by all Ministers of his Department since 1990, including *(a)* details of the places visited and brief reasons for the visit, *(b)* details of the size, composition and cost to public funds of the delegation and *(c)* the names of non-ministerial members of each delegation and the capacity in which each was present. [17497]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 18 July 1995, *Official Report* columns *1052–56*, and will place in the Library a list updating this information accordingly.

Quota Hopping

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement in respect of the judgment by the European Court of Justice in case C48/93—Factortame III. [19554]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The judgment of the European Court of Justice in case 48/93 was delivered earlier today and runs to 22 pages. The court concluded that the principle that member states are obliged to make good damage caused to individuals by breaches of Community law attributable to the state is applicable where the national legislature was responsible for the breach in question and where the breach is sufficiently serious. The court also concluded that it will be for the national courts to decide whether such a breach has occurred and what damages if any are payable.

These conclusions and the court's judgment will be the subject of detailed scrutiny in the weeks ahead.

The judgment is a stage in the action brought by Factortame Ltd. and others in the UK divisional court against Her Majesty's Government for damages in respect of the losses incurred during the period they were excluded from the UK fishing vessel register and unable to fish. In considering this action the UK divisional court asked for guidance from the European Court as to whether in principle member states are liable to pay damages for losses arising from measures which were held in breach of treaty obligations. It will be for the Factortame applicants to decide whether and how to proceed with their action for damages before the UK courts.

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action the Government plan to take at the intergovernmental conference to deal with quota hopping; and if he will make a statement [19555]

Mr. Hogg: There is an inconsistency underlying the quota regime of the common fisheries policy in that the quotas allocated to each member state do not always benefit the fishing communities of that member state. This is because the eligibility for quotas and their administration by member states has to take full account of general treaty provisions, for example, on right of

establishment and freedom of movement. This has undermined the benefit which the UK fishing industry has been able to secure from the fishing opportunities available to it under the common fisheries policy. We shall be pursuing this. In particular, we shall be exploring at the IGC whether there are treaty changes which could be made which would help to ensure that the fishing opportunities arising form national quotas provide real benefits to the fishing communities of the flag member state.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he had with the Secretary to the Cabinet concerning the Government's response to the Scott inquiry; and where and when such consultations took place. [16601]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* Successive Governments have not disclosed the nature of specific sources of the advice they receive from the civil service.

Military Exports

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the procedures which have been obtained in his Department since 1974 to ensure that Parliament was informed of exports of military goods and services and dual-use goods and services to *(a)* the middle east, *(b)* Iran and *(c)* Iraq; and if he will indicate in which years changes took place. [17344]

Mr. Lang: Details of the exports of goods to Iran and Iraq are published monthly in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom".

No information is given for the middle east as a bloc, although each of the individual countries' data are published.

Information is given for goods only. Broad commodity details are given for all countries. Figures for military goods and dual-use goods are not given as identified blocks. However, the Ministry of Defence, in the annual publication "UK Defence Statistics", publishes identified military exports and imports, but only in relation to broad geographic areas. There are no figures for dual-use goods because the classification under which export statistics are collected does not refer to dual-use goods.

Until 1988, the DTI published the "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom". From 1989 to early 1995, they were published by the Central Statistical Office. Since April 1995, they have been published by HM Customs and Excise. Details of the exports of goods to Iran and Iraq are published monthly in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom".

On 26 February, the Government placed in the Library of the House a document setting out the current position in relation to informing Parliament on the export of arms, with an explanation of how this practice has evolved.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of total United Kingdom *(a)* exports, *(b)* imports and *(c)* total trade is represented by trade with EC countries according to the latest available figures. [17785]

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on imports and exports is published by the Central Statistical Office in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", which is available in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Accountability

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of the Trade, pursuant to paragraph K8.1 of the Scott report relating to ministerial accountability, what additional measures he proposes to ensure his Department's compliance with paragraph 27 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". [17318]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 February 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the speech that I made on 26 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns 589–604.

Endowment Policies

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the percentage of endowment policy holders who may have insufficient funds on maturity to meet their full mortgage repayment liabilities expressing this data by year of maturity. [17472]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* I regret that this information is not available.

Insolvency Service

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money has been spent on the process of contracting out the work of the Official Receiver, broken down to show *(a)* the cost of the consultancy work, *(b)* the cost of the legal advice, *(c)* the notional costs of Insolvency Service staff working on the contracting out process and *(d)* the costs of Department of Trade and Industry services provided to the Insolvency Service. [17462]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* The cost of the contracting-out exercise undertaken by the Insolvency Service, in the period beginning October 1994, when the Government announced their intention to pursue the preferred option identified by the then consultants, to the announcement on 28 February 1996 of the outcome, was as follows:

	Cost (£) exclusive of VAT where applicable
Costs of external consultants	668,201
Costs of external legal advice	54,122
Estimated costs of Insolvency Service staff	1,265,527
Costs of DTI services provided to the Insolvency Service	300,744
Total	2,288,594

Official Receiver

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* bankruptcy and *(b)* winding-up orders were made during the 12 months ended 31 January; and how many were administered by each Official Receiver's office during the 12 months ended 31 January. [17463]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* The number of bankruptcy and winding-up orders made in the 12 months to 31 January 1996 and the number of cases in which the administration was completed in each Official Receiver's office are as set out in the table.

Office	*Bankruptcy orders*		*Winding-up orders*	
	Made	*Administration completed*	*Made*	*Administration completed*
Birmingham	1,144	1,316	269	387
Brighton	958	1,610	191	453
Bristol	696	819	173	201
Gloucester	497	423	48	47
Canterbury	366	412	56	84
Rochester	473	720	93	165
Cardiff	407	747	111	199
Croydon	1,243	1,912	373	552
Hull	469	598	84	103
Leeds	920	733	270	200
Liverpool	353	331	79	75
Manchester	1,006	832	271	345
Newcastle	496	1,142	123	169
Stockton	335	269	81	52
Northampton	616	522	95	104
Cambridge	364	572	66	97
Norwich	589	668	107	156
Ipswich	397	346	48	78
Nottingham	718	779	86	111
Leicester	398	410	47	75
Plymouth	1,036	971	74	67
Exeter	569	780	43	87
Reading	805	867	229	260
St. Albans	817	827	195	184
St. Annes	684	538	114	76
Sheffield	488	554	68	69
Southampton	660	504	130	207
Bournemouth	520	568	84	105
Southend	804	1,017	154	163
Stoke	440	423	54	79
Chester	415	454	66	81
Swansea	499	542	96	139
London A	3	25	75	115
London B	936	154	738	102
London C	938	123	734	99
Manchester closing unit	0	6,292	0	876
London support unit	0	2,499	0	2,241
Total	22,059	32,299	5,525	8,603

USA (Inward Investment)

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what has been the level of inward investment into the USA by United Kingdom firms in each of the last 20 years; [18202]

(2) what have been the levels of inward investment into the United Kingdom by *(a)* German firms, *(b)* EU firms and *(c)* US firms in each of the last 20 years. [18159]

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on foreign direct investment is published regularly by the Central Statistical Office in "Business Monitor MA4, Overseas Transactions", which is available in the Library of the House. The latest information, for 1994, was published by the Central Statistical Office on 18 December 1995 in "First Release", CSO(95)296.

United States-United Kingdom Trade

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the mutual United Kingdom-United States balance of trade in each year since 1975. [18157]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is published by the Central Statistical Office in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistical" which is available in the Library of the House.

United States-United Kingdom Relations

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on United States-United Kingdom relations; and what proposals he has to develop closer relations. [18160]

Mr. Oppenheim: Relations between the United Kingdom and the United States are excellent. Our exports to the United States continue to grow and we remain the largest foreign investor there, while the US sends the largest share of its overseas investment here. Relations will be enhanced by the action plan agreed last December by the European Union and the United States which provides for co-operation on issues of international importance including further trade liberalisation. In addition, the Department of Trade and Industry will launch in May the second phase of the "North America Now" campaign, which will seek to achieve even more business in the United States for British companies.

Germany (Balance of Trade)

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the balance of trade with Germany in each year since 1975. [18158]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is published by the Central Statistical Office in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", which is available in the Library of the House.

W H Smith

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will refer W H Smith to the Director General of Fair Trading in respect of discrimination against smaller circulation periodicals. [18344]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Director General of Fair Trading—DGFT—is responsible for investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour, abuse of monopoly power or restrictive trade practices. If anyone has firm evidence that W H Smith may be breaching competition law, they should bring it to the attention of the DGFT.

Magnox Reactors

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *511*, if the fossil fuel levy after 1988 will cover British Nuclear Fuels plc's liability for the Magnox reactors; and if he will make a statement. [17833]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* The fossil fuel levy will cover British Nuclear Fuels plc only until the end of the nuclear non-fossil fuel obligation—NFFO—in 1998.

Battery Technology

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance he has given to universities and other research institutions engaged in battery technology. [18772]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Financial support from my Department to universities and other research institutions is by means of science budget allocation to the six UK research councils and subsequently by research grants to individual researchers or research units. Funds are available for research in batteries technology through the responsive grant mode in the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council. Detailed information on project expenditure for specific technologies that rely on a diverse range of underlying science is not collated centrally. The Engineering and Physical Science Research Council—EPSRC—has identified in its February 1996 publication "Response to Foresight" that a number of its programmes contribute to underpinning research in fuel cells and photovoltaics. It is intended that a specific managed programme in energy storage will be developed by the EPSRC across the materials, chemistry, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering and clean technology programme, with a view to launching it in 1997.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what extent the technology foresight initiative focused on battery technology; and what policy changes resulted. [18771]

Mr. Taylor: Battery technology emerged as a technology worthy of emphasis for the energy sector in the technology foresight exercise. The energy panel considered that the challenge to manufacture electricity storage systems with, say, four times the energy density and comparable life cycle of the traditional lead/acid battery at competitive cost, remained formidable. It identified additional requirements for advanced high-energy batteries, including improved state-of-change sensors and electronics for thermal management.

Following the recommendations of the technology foresight panel, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council is proposing a directed research activity in energy storage, particularly batteries, which is expected to be launched in late 1996/early 1997. The main applications will be for uninterruptable power and for transport applications.

Bankruptcy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce legislation to make it an offence to seek to induce a creditor to delay instituting an action for bankruptcy against a debtor solely for the reason that a successful action would disqualify the debtor from membership of the House. [18863]

Mr. Oppenheim: No. It is for creditors to decide if and when they should institute bankruptcy proceedings.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people have been declared bankrupt in the past three years for debts totalling *(a)* less than £5,000, *(b)* £10,000, *(c)* £20,000, *(d)* £50,000, *(e)* £100,000 and *(f)* £1,000,000 or over or such classification as is available. [18557]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* The number of bankruptcy orders in England and Wales in the last three years was as follows:

1993: 31,016

1994: 25,634

1995: 21,933.

Information on the size of debts could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which serving civil servants in his Department are presently directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18149]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* DTI staff may not in general hold directorships in public or private companies, firms or other organisations, although the holding of non-executive directorships in small, private, family-type companies is permitted if no conflict of interest results. Officials consult their line managers on such matters. Any fees paid are an individual matter and no central records are kept.

A number of senior DTI staff hold unpaid developmental non-executive directorships. Details of these, together with those of other Departments, are published in the Cabinet Office's annual report.

British Coal

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines he has issued to the company DTZ regarding the requirement that it approves the sale of British Coal property. [18814]

Mr. Page: British Coal is responsible for the disposal of its property. It is advised by DTZ. My Department has issued no guidelines to DTZ.

Collieries

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contact his Department has had with *(a)* HJ Banks and *(b)* the DTZ bank concerning (i) Houghton Main colliery and (ii) Woolley colliery. [18815]

Mr. Page: My Department has had no contact with HJ Banks or British Coal's property advisers DTZ about either colliery.

Faulty Workmanship

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to amend part III of the Fair Trading Act 1973 in respect of redress for faulty workmanship. [19137]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no plans to do so.

Inward Investment (Merseyside)

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he is taking to improve the management of inward investment inquiries and the delivery of projects on Merseyside. [18842]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The Department of Trade and Industry supports the work of INWARD, the north-west's regional development organisation, in handling inward investment inquiries throughout the region, including Merseyside. In addition, the Government office for Merseyside is working with local partners, including INWARD, to develop and agree an inward investment strategy for Merseyside aimed at improving the region's inward investment performance.

Decommissioning

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Government's responsibility for the decommissioning costs including site clearance costs of the experimental nuclear reactor previously operated by the Scottish universities research and reactor centre at the former national engineering laboratory site in East Kilbride. [18066]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* Responsibility for the decommissioning of the experimental nuclear reactor at the Scottish Enterprise technology park at East Kilbride lies with the operator concerned, which in this case is the Scottish universities research and reactor centre.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what factors led to the delay in the announcement relating to the privatisation of the Insolvency Service that occurred on 28 February. [18684]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The announcement on the outcome of the contracting-out exercise undertaken by the Insolvency Service was delayed to provide an opportunity for further ministerial discussion.

Departmental Expenditure (Waveney)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total expenditure by his Department in Waveney in 1994–95; what it will be in 1995–96, broken down by category; and if he will make a statement. [17843]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* For 1994–95 none. For 1995–96, Norfolk and Waveney business link has a total budget of £1.4 million to provide a wide range of business support services through all its outlets, including the one in Lowestoft.

TRANSPORT

A46–A47 Link Road

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been *(a)* awarded and *(b)* paid to Leicestershire county council for *(a)* the eastern district distributor road and *(b)* the A46–A47 link road in each year since the start of the scheme. [17049]

Mr. Norris: No resources have been allocated for EDDR.

The A46–A47 link road has been accepted for the transport supplementary grant since 1985–86. The following amounts have been accepted:

£000

Year	*Bid*	*Accepted*	*Spend*
1985–86	135	135	21
1986–87	681	681	133
1987–88	1,459	1,200	20
1988–89	1,942	1,942	249
1989–90	1,988	1,988	1,910
1990–91	2,184	2,184	209
1991–92	2,601	2,601	38
1992–93	2,314	2,314	327
1993–94	2,026	2,026	90
1994–95	741	741	150
1995–96	1,348	750	[1]315
1996–97	3,740	[2]0	—

TSG is paid at a rate of 50 per cent.of accepted expenditure, with the remainder being allocated as credit approvals. Grant may be adjusted downwards because of underspending in earlier years, but this is calculated on the authority's programme as a whole. It is not possible to say how much of Leicestershire's grant adjustments relate to underspending on this scheme.

[1] Budget figure.

[2] Although no resources were sanctioned, the scheme was accepted for TSG and remains eligible for further support.

Paloma (Seaman's Death)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the circumstances surrounding the death of a seaman on a Cypriot-registered coaster in the Humber on 22 February; and if he will make a statement. [17991]

Mr. Norris: The marine accident investigation branch is investigating the explosion which took place on the Paloma and the chief inspector of marine accidents will take appropriate action once the investigation has been completed.

Milford Haven

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many ship-system failures and serious incidents involving tankers have happened at Milford Haven since January 1993. [17891]

Mr. Norris: There have been 10 incidents reported to the marine accident investigation branch involving tankers in Milford Haven since 1993.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish for each of the last three available years *(a)* the number of tanker movements into Milford Haven and *(b)* the total tonnage of oil and oil products unloaded, loaded and carried by sea. [17981]

Mr. Norris: The figure requested for Milford Haven are as follows:

	Tanker movements (Number)	*Oil traffic million tonnes*	
		Inwards	*Outwards*
1992	2,964	20.8	14.3
1993	2,858	21.1	14.2
1994	2,738	20.2	13.7

Source: Port Statistics.

Petroleum Coke

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the procedures governing the transportation of pet coke. [17925]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about the procedures governing the transportation of PET Coke.

The procedures governing the transportation of petroleum coke are contained in the Code of Safe Practice for Solid Bulk Cargoes (the BC Code) adopted by the International Maritime Organisation.

I enclose the relevant extract from this Code for your information.

Appendix B: Petroleum coke[1] calcined or uncalcined

BC number	*IMO class*	*MFAG table number*	*Approximate stowage factor (m^3/t)*	*EmS number*
040	MHB	311	1.25 to 1.67	B7

[1] For comprehensive information on transport of any material listed refer to sections 1–10 of this Code.

Properties

Black, finely divided residue from petroleum refining in the form of power and small pieces.

Observations

The provisions of this appendix should not apply to materials having a temperature below 55°C when loaded.

Segregation and stowage requirements

"Separated from" foodstuffs.

"Separated longitudinally by an intervening complete compartment or hold from" all goods of class 1, divisions 1.1 and 1.5.

"Separated by a complete compartment or hold from" all other dangerous and hazardous materials (goods in packaged form and solid bulk materials).

Special requirements

1. Should not be loaded when the temperature exceeds 107°C.

2. In cargo spaces over tanks containing fuel or material having a flashpoint under 93°C, a layer of 0.6m to 1.0m of the material at a temperature not greater than 44°C should first be loaded into the cargo space. Only then may the material, at 55°C or above, be loaded into that cargo space.

3. The loading of the material should be as follows:

(1) for shipments in cargo spaces over fuel tanks, the loading of the 0.6m to 1.0m layer at a temperature not greater than

44°C (as required in 2) should be completed prior to the loading of the material at 55°C or above in any cargo space of the ship;

(2) upon completion of the loading described in 3.1, a layer of 0.6m to 1.0m of the material at 55°C or above should first be loaded in each cargo space (including those cargo spaces, if any, already containing a layer of the material at a temperature not greater than 44°C) in which the material is to be loaded in accordance with this entry;

(3) upon the completion of the loading of the 0.6m to 1.0m layer of the material at 55°C or above in each cargo space (as required in 3.2), the normal loading of the material at 55°C or above may proceed to completion; and

(4) personnel should be warned by the master of the ship that calcined petroleum coke loaded and transported under this entry is hot and that injury due to burns is possible if precautions are not taken.

Transport Policies and Programmes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place copies in the Library of all the decision letters for transport policies and programme bids submitted by local authorities in 1995. [18164]

Mr. Norris: I will write to the hon. Member.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to ensure that HGVs and other vehicles with restricted rear views, have correctly fitted and aligned rear-view mirrors. [18094]

Mr. Norris: Mirrors fitted to vehicles on the road are already required to meet specific standards in respect of installation and field of vision. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that the mirrors are adjusted correctly.

Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the involvement of UK airports in the process of air service negotiations. [18443]

Mr. Norris: Where a UK airport has an interest in the outcome of air services negotiations, representatives from that airport are involved in the Department's internal briefing meetings where tactics and objectives are reviewed and a negotiating strategy agreed. At those briefing meetings, the Department also considers the case for the airport representatives attending the air services negotiations.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what rights have been negotiated for *(a)* UK and *(b)* foreign airlines to initiate new international services for UK regional airports in the last six months; [18445]

(2) which airline services have been unable to operate to UK regional airports as a result of failure to achieve a successful negotiation of traffic rights in the last six months. [18444]

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom already has a very large number of bilateral agreements with foreign partners which allow the airlines of both sides access to regional airports in both countries. In most cases, it is solely a lack of demand that inhibits the provision of services under these agreements. In the past six months, new rights have been negotiated successively for:

(i) Air Mauritius (Manchester);

(ii) Gulf Air (Manchester and other UK regional airports);

(iii) Air Seychelles (Manchester);

(iv) Pakistan International Airways (any UK regional airport);

(v) El Al (a third ex-gratia Manchester service).

Under the agreements with Mauritius, Bahrain, the Seychelles and Pakistan, UK airlines can serve any UK regional airport. However, the agreement with Israel specifies London as the only UK point for both sides. El Al's Manchester rights have been granted ex-gratia.

The only service which has been unable to operate to a UK regional airport because of a failure to achieve a successful negotiation of traffic rights in the last six months is a service to Jamaica applied for by Air Jamaica.

EC Aviation Directives

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the EC directives issued over the last two years relating to aviation. [18441]

Mr. Norris: Council directive 94/56/EC of 21 November 1994 establishing the fundamental principles governing the investigation of civil aviation accidents and incidents.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many transport supplementary grant projects in England this year are for schemes individually costing less than £5 million; and what proportion of the total spending on transport grants is represented by schemes of less than £5 million each. [18297]

Mr. Norris: Transport supplementary grant is paid in support of major road schemes costing more than £2 million, bridge assessment and strengthening, and structural maintenance of principal roads. Of the £688.9 million expenditure accepted for TSG in 1995–96, £267.4 million—38.8—was for expenditure on bridges and structural maintenance, and £421.5 million—61.2 per cent.—was for major road schemes. Out of this £421.5 million, £60.3 million—14.3 per cent.—was for the 66 major schemes costing less than £5 million.

For 1996–97, the equivalent figures are: total accepted expenditure of £551.1 million, of which £190.9 million—34.6 per cent.—is for bridges and structural maintenance, and £360.2 million—65.4 per cent.—for major road schemes. Of this latter figure, £37.6 million—10.4 per cent.—is for the 36 major schemes costing less than £5 million.

Disabled People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many national mobility centres there are in Great Britain; and how many of those are in Coventry. [18545]

Mr. Norris: There are 19 independent mobility centres in Great Britain. None of those is in Coventry, but the city does have a commercial centre which, I understand, offers a similar service. The Department publishes information on the service provided by all the centres in the UK in its "Guide to Services in the UK offering Advice, Information and Assessment to Disabled and Elderly Motorists". A new edition is being prepared and I will send a copy to the hon. Gentleman when it is available.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many disabled people require specialised transportation. [18541]

Mr. Norris: There are about 6 million disabled adults in this country, of whom around 4 million have a disability which is likely to affect their mobility. Many are already using accessible mainstream public transport while others rely on specialist door-to-door services. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, regulations will be introduced requiring all future public transport to be fully accessible. This should mean that, increasingly, special services are seen as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, accessible public transport.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to make accessible to disabled people information about transport suitable to their specific mobility needs; [18544]

(2) what representations he has received from organisations concerned with access to disability transport information. [18543]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport already provides a wide range of information to disabled people about accessible public transport services, special services and personal mobility. This information is generally available in print and alternative media including Braille, tape and large print.

A new edition of the Department's comprehensive guide "Door to Door—A Guide to Transport for Disabled People" will be published shortly.

All the Department's information is produced in consultation with disabled people, including our statutory advisers the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

Passenger Rail Services

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the progress of the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising towards securing by 1 April the transfer to franchise agreements of 51 per cent. or more of passenger services previously operated by the British Railways Board. [18488]

Mr. Watts: The franchising programme is making good progress. Fourteen of the 25 train operating companies, representing 61 per cent. of passenger revenue in the financial year 1994–95 have either been franchised or are in the process of being sold.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which subsidiaries of the British Railways Board he estimates will be in public ownership at 1 January 1997. [18484]

Mr. Watts: The current subsidiaries of the board presently expected to be in public ownership on 1 January 1987 are British Rail Savings Co. Ltd., British Rail International Ltd. and Southdowns Village Ltd. A number of other subsidiaries may be formed between now and 1 January 1997, the majority of which are expected to be sold by that date.

Some passenger train operating companies may remain in public ownership on 1 January 1997. The precise number will depend on the progress which the franchising director makes in selling railway franchises this year.

The following are dormant subsidiaries of the board. They seem likely to remain subsidiaries at 1 January 1997:

British Transport Hotels Ltd.
Freightliners Ltd.
British Rail Engineering Ltd.
Advanced Passenger Trains Ltd.
RFD (Channel Tunnel) Ltd.
Europabus Ltd.
Oil Rail Terminals Ltd.
Railway Finance Ltd.
Masterhaul Ltd.
The Pullman Car Co. Ltd.
Railway Sites Ltd.
British Rail Investments Ltd.
British Rail Hovercraft Ltd.
British Rail Maintenance Ltd.
Britravel Nominees Ltd.
Mastertank Ltd.

Sea Empress

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what requests for assistance have been received by his office in respect of clear-up operations following the Sea Empress disaster. [18358]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about personnel involved in clear-up operations following the 'Sea Empress' disaster.

On 29 February the total number of personnel involved in clear-up operations was 806.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if animal welfare organisations involved in the rescue operations arising from the Sea Empress disaster will be able to claim compensation from the ship's insurers. [18353]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* Yes. Compensation for cost incurred and economic loss suffered as a result of the oil pollution damage for the Sea

Empress including the costs of reasonable measures taken to prevent or minimise the damage, will be available from the shipowner's insurer and from the international oil pollution compensation fund, which is funded by levies on the oil industry.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what accounts he has received from *(a)* the Milford Haven port authority or *(b)* other sources of the grounding of the Sea Empress; and if he will make a statement. [17980]

Mr. Norris: The investigation into the causes of the Sea Empress accident will involve the gathering of information from all relevant sources. The establishment of the inspector's inquiry has been advertised formally inviting all parties with material facts to come forward.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons no heavy duty salvage tug was available at Milford Haven on the day the Sea Empress went aground; and if he will make a statement. [17982]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C.J. Haris to Mr. Cynog Dafis, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about tugs.

The Coastguard Agency has two emergency towing vessels stationed at Stornoway and Dover during the winter months. It has an arrangement by liaison with a tug operator to provide, on an availability basis but without guarantee, a tug in the South West Approaches (Penzance/Lands End). This vessel was not available during the Sea Empress incident.

The availability of heavy duty tugs is otherwise a matter for the commercial market; their provision is arranged by professional brokers to meet the requests of the masters or owners of ships, or salvors.

Lighthouse Keepers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many lighthouse keepers there are in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland. [18774]

Mr. Norris: There are 105 lighthouse keepers in Great Britain and six in Northern Ireland.

East Coast Main Line

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the contract between Stagecoach Holdings plc and British Rail with regard to its operations on the east coast main line. [18573]

Mr. Watts: The contract between InterCity West Coast and Stagecoach Holdings plc, under which Stagecoach provided overnight seated train services from Aberdeen, Dundee, and Edinburgh to London and return, is commercially confidential.

Road Construction

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the planned expenditure on road construction in the years *(a)* 1995 to 1996 and *(b)* 1996 to 1997; and if he will make a statement. [18741]

Mr. Watts: Expenditure on new construction in England, net of capital receipts and design, build, finance and operate current costs, is estimated at £1,169 million in 1995–96 and £973 million in 1996–97 in cash terms. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made two announcements on 28 November 1995 to detail the background to this expenditure.

InterCity

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the accounts of InterCity at the time of its break-up. [18572]

Mr. Watts: The accounts of InterCity for this period are incorporated in the British Railways Board's annual report and accounts for 1993–94, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Channel Tunnel (Inspections)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the dates of inspections undertaken by his Department on the channel tunnel for the last 12 months, indicating the deficiencies found at each inspection. [18676]

Mr. Watts: Safety inspections of the channel tunnel are carried out by inspectors of national authorities of UK and France and other experts authorised by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority. These inspectors visit the tunnel several times a month and report to the safety authority on a range of matters; no major deficiency has been reported. Where problems have been identified, they have been raised with Eurotunnel which has taken corrective action.

Herald of Free Enterprise

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the recommendations of the report into the loss of the Herald of Free Enterprise that have not yet been implemented; and when he expects these to be implemented. [18674]

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the House of 16 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *83–84*.

Accident Statistics

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by police force the number of accidents involving *(a)* heavy goods vehicles, *(b)* passenger service vehicles and *(c)* minibuses for each of the last five years. [18668]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the following three tables. Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

Personal injury road accidents involving an HGV by year and police authority: Great Britain 1990–1994

Accidents

Police Authority	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Metropolitan Police	1,684	1,302	1,169	1,195	1,228
Cumbria	176	154	156	159	135
Lancashire	281	213	237	281	334
Merseyside	292	283	286	281	337
Greater Manchester	667	606	573	619	615
Cheshire	403	364	339	418	429
Northumbria	255	232	184	212	176
Durham	124	120	113	118	112
North Yorkshire	347	351	312	292	286

Personal injury road accidents involving an HGV by year and police authority: Great Britain 1990–1994

Accidents

Police Authority	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
West Yorkshire	454	499	441	453	378
South Yorkshire	292	286	269	255	273
Humberside	232	214	261	230	261
Cleveland	69	87	66	63	45
West Midlands	479	407	421	414	432
Staffordshire	355	368	363	358	498
West Mercia	366	329	290	257	376
Warwickshire	225	176	172	191	174
Derbyshire	303	277	280	256	212
Nottinghamshire	283	289	267	259	260
Lincolnshire	287	219	245	246	188
Leicestershire	315	294	269	281	251
Northamptonshire	291	263	228	218	210
Cambridgeshire	327	281	272	264	253
Norfolk	255	260	276	227	230
Suffolk	190	159	166	160	184
Bedfordshire	196	157	146	165	152
Hertfordshire	268	233	210	287	248
Essex	471	427	418	456	438
Thames Valley	517	528	508	529	494
Hampshire	440	387	362	370	360
Surrey	306	233	224	224	281
Kent	456	375	436	429	438
Sussex	321	294	283	293	302
City of London[1]	0	0	0	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	344	289	259	293	290
Avon and Somerset	290	265	266	254	224
Gloucestershire	141	130	119	130	152
Wiltshire	211	187	193	260	241
Dorset	161	147	148	144	140
North Wales	196	212	182	159	181
Gwent	104	113	90	91	112
South Wales	228	216	225	197	202
Dyfed-Powys	207	206	197	168	159
Northern	83	43	62	60	55
Grampian	135	145	126	114	91
Tayside	133	113	105	115	119
Fife	50	52	52	47	36
Lothian and Borders	175	154	141	140	109
Central	47	58	56	50	42
Strathclyde	542	519	480	397	363
Dumfries and Galloway	89	100	73	94	72
Total	15,063	13,616	13,016	13,173	13,178

[1] Incorporated into the Metropolitan Police figure.

Personal injury road accidents involving a PSV by year and police authority: Great Britain 1990–1994

Accidents

Police Authority	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Metropolitan Police	3,212	3,140	3,073	2,885	2,864
Cumbria	47	39	48	55	50
Lancashire	216	228	218	205	232
Merseyside	418	421	443	491	477
Greater Manchester	668	564	594	583	639
Cheshire	113	109	111	97	112
Northumbria	426	390	355	353	362
Durham	123	116	123	127	135
North Yorkshire	91	93	90	84	117
West Yorkshire	535	550	537	490	528
South Yorkshire	532	423	453	519	484
Humberside	177	168	199	197	215
Cleveland	163	101	107	113	124
West Midlands	437	424	399	375	432
Staffordshire	174	136	153	163	178
West Mercia	113	84	88	101	81
Warwickshire	41	38	34	30	39
Derbyshire	141	118	114	87	121

Personal injury road accidents involving a PSV by year and police authority: Great Britain 1990–1994

Accidents

Police Authority	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Nottinghamshire	273	220	193	199	237
Lincolnshire	47	36	37	43	39
Leicestershire	106	91	85	96	99
Northamptonshire	56	50	42	36	40
Cambridgeshire	84	66	73	46	46
Norfolk	71	69	84	65	67
Suffolk	62	47	65	32	56
Bedfordshire	56	32	50	48	65
Hertfordshire	75	83	72	90	80
Essex	166	143	130	146	145
Thames Valley	211	227	228	223	198
Hampshire	208	213	200	198	256
Surrey	73	51	52	54	68
Kent	123	111	172	139	118
Sussex	176	177	190	232	226
City of London[1]	0	0	0	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	194	158	142	171	174
Avon and Somerset	143	178	144	150	164
Gloucestershire	47	40	51	57	50
Wiltshire	50	55	51	57	46
Dorset	74	74	63	86	96
North Wales	79	82	85	66	91
Gwent	58	50	68	58	48
South Wales	249	231	206	232	262
Dyfed-Powys	60	50	37	38	39
Northern	21	24	32	20	15
Grampian	119	110	117	74	78
Tayside	77	69	57	52	40
Fife	60	49	35	33	35
Lothian and Borders	508	470	474	407	489
Central	56	48	55	39	46
Strathclyde	768	760	617	573	565
Dumfries and Galloway	16	15	10	16	9
Total	11,993	11,221	11,056	10,731	11,177

[1] Incorporated into the Metropolitan Police figure.

Personal injury road accidents involving a minibus[1] by year and police authority: Great Britain 1990–1994

Accidents

Police Authority	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Metropolitan Police	114	136	133	128	123
Cumbria	22	28	24	32	20
Lancashire	37	39	48	32	51
Merseyside	68	77	74	86	68
Greater Manchester	109	93	82	95	112
Cheshire	43	37	49	29	35
Northumbria	24	20	18	20	22
Durham	8	17	16	9	19
North Yorkshire	56	34	44	37	47
West Yorkshire	38	30	32	36	28
South Yorkshire	48	40	42	34	39
Humberside	28	26	25	18	23
Cleveland	19	11	4	8	9
West Midlands	51	59	55	60	74
Staffordshire	28	23	21	36	60
West Mercia	36	18	15	22	39
Warwickshire	8	9	14	12	18
Derbyshire	7	6	6	11	14
Nottinghamshire	32	20	16	31	22
Lincolnshire	40	20	27	25	27
Leicestershire	58	27	40	41	38
Northamptonshire	22	25	16	7	11
Cambridgeshire	32	40	33	26	25
Norfolk	51	39	26	31	36
Suffolk	11	18	15	25	23
Bedfordshire	13	16	17	11	18
Hertfordshire	22	18	16	16	23

Personal injury road accidents involving a minibus[1] by year and police authority: Great Britain 1990–1994

Accidents

Police Authority	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Essex	42	51	49	52	51
Thames Valley	52	64	65	59	66
Hampshire	77	74	75	81	67
Surrey	40	26	23	25	45
Kent	78	79	56	91	79
Sussex	63	56	63	46	57
City of London[2]	0	0	0	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	58	34	47	52	65
Avon and Somerset	31	48	27	27	33
Gloucestershire	18	23	17	18	26
Wiltshire	8	6	20	16	14
Dorset	24	27	23	29	29
North Wales	41	44	34	46	34
Gwent	24	25	19	29	30
South Wales	51	57	65	0	3
Dyfed-Powys	27	35	32	27	28
Northern	27	31	26	27	14
Grampian	40	18	22	21	10
Tayside	17	15	14	9	12
Fife	20	11	11	12	12
Lothian and Borders	21	36	20	18	13
Central	9	6	14	16	10
Strathclyde	122	88	76	74	76
Dumfries and Galloway	11	10	5	6	7
Total	1,926	1,790	1,711	1,699	1,805

[1] Accidents including motor caravans are also included.
[2] Incorporated into the Metropolitan Police figure.

Car Sharing

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards car sharing; what guidelines he issues to *(a)* insurance companies and *(b)* the public on the scale of contributory fares which can be accepted as (i) non-profit-making by the Inland Revenue and (ii) non-commercial in respect of third party insurance cover; and what plans he has to give increased publicity and encouragement to such schemes. [18856]

Mr. Norris: The Government support the concept of car sharing and brought forward the Transport Act 1980 which legalised non-profit-making car sharing schemes. Following the 1980 Act, the Department of Transport issued advice which, amongst other points, covered the calculation of the sharing of costs with regard to the relevant requirements of the Inland Revenue and the insurance companies.

Marine Safety

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he requires the Marine Safety Agency to carry out with the fishing industry; and what proposals he has for improving the system of consultation. [18785]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about the Marine Safety Agency's consultation with the fishing industry and proposal for its improvement.

The existing consultation framework comprises principally of meetings of the MSA's Fishing Industry Safety Group (FISG), of FISG Sub-Groups and of Steering Groups set up by FISG to oversee particular developments, together with informal and formal written consultation on legislative and other proposals. A meeting has been arranged with representatives of the fishermen's federations on Tuesday 26 March to discuss industry's concerns about current arrangements and to seek agreement on a framework for future consultation.

London and Continental

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what individual value he has put on each of the assets and debt write-offs which are to benefit London and Continental. [19094]

Mr. Watts: The value of the assets and businesses to be transferred to London and Continental is that which has been determined by the open and keenly fought competition which London and Continental won. It is not for me to second-guess the market price.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he decided to use public funds to subsidise the channel tunnel rail link. [19097]

Mr. Watts: The then Secretary of State announced on 14 June 1990, *Official Report*, columns 482–500, that he was prepared to consider a capital grant for the channel tunnel rail link, but that the terms then on offer were not acceptable. On 24 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns 19–34, my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State announced in an oral statement that the Government were willing in principle to provide substantial public sector support, in recognition not only of the significant domestic transport and regeneration benefits from the new line but of some of the very large benefits to international passengers.

Emergency Towing Study Team Report

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he first received a copy of the report of the emergency towing study team; and what action he has taken to implement its findings to date. [18892]

Mr. Norris: The chief executive of the Coastguard agency received a copy on the Secretary of State's behalf on 25 May 1995. The report recommended that priority for providing emergency towing vessels should be given to two areas, the Dover strait and north-west Scotland. The Coastguard agency chartered emergency towing vessels for these two areas for the six-months winter period.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *581*, what consultations he has conducted on the report of the emergency towing study team. [18901]

Mr. Norris: The Coastguard agency, through the government shipping broker, invited tenders for two emergency towing vessels for the Dover straits and north-west Scotland. This involved discussions with the

Government broker, with tugowners and brokers and with the British Tugowners Association. The agency also had regard to the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas", which itself drew on extensive discussions with those who presented evidence to his inquiry.

Oil-handling Ports

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for the latest available year the 10 main oil-handling ports in the British Isles, indicating the total tonnage *(a)* disembarked and *(b)* embarked in each case, and the appropriate proportion for each port. [17984]

Mr. Norris: The top 10 oil-handling ports in the United Kingdom for 1994 are as follows:

	Thousand tonnes			
Port	*Total*	*Inwards*	*Outwards*	*Proportion of UK total percentage*
Forth	40,476	2,400	38,076	15.0
Sullom Voe	38,577	2	38,575	14.3
Milford Haven	33,881	20,231	13,650	12.6
London	24,408	18,739	5,669	9.0
Tees and Hartlepool	24,141	2,291	21,850	9.0
Southampton	23,584	15,061	8,523	8.7
Grimsby and Immingham	21,772	14,184	7,588	8.1
Liverpool	15,256	13,781	1,475	5.7
Orkneys	13,885	30	13,856	5.1
Rivers Hull and Humber	5,427	5,427	0	2.0
Total for above	241,407	92,146	149,262	89.5
Total for UK	269,721	113,892	155,829	—

Source:
Port Statistics 1994.

Drivers (Pass Plus)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many newly qualified drivers have taken pass plus since February 1995; what percentage of such drivers this represents; and what has been the success rate on pass plus in percentage and number terms. [19201]

Mr. Norris: As at the end of February 1996, 12,383 certificates had been issued to drivers completing a pass plus course. This represents about 1.5 per cent. of newly qualified drivers. It is too early to determine what effect pass plus will have had on the accident record of those that have taken the course.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many drivers have taken pass plus; what percentage have passed; and if he will make a statement. [19200]

Mr. Norris: As at the end of February 1996, 12,383 certificates had been issued to drivers completing a pass plus course. Pass plus which is designed for newly qualified drivers, is not a pass/fail course although the approved driving instructor giving the training has to be satisfied that the pupil has reached a satisfactory standard on all six modules.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Millennium Exhibition

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will now institute an inquiry into how the decision that the millennium exhibition should be sited in Greenwich was announced by the policy chairman of the Corporation of London before her statement in Parliament. [19073]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 March. [17169]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 5 March. [17171]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is carrying out official engagements in the far east.

Sir Gerrard Neale

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister when Sir Gerrard Neale last visited 10 Downing street; and if on that occasion he telephoned UCB from there. [19098]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I have nothing further to add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 29 February, *Official Report*, column *672*.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Prime Minister what facilities have been extended to Sir Gerrard Neale to have access to 12 Downing street in the last 12 months; and what access he has had to office and telephones there. [18864]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

It is not the practice of my right hon. Friend to indicate what meetings he has with Members of Parliament or former Members of Parliament. No office or telephone facilities have been made available to Sir Gerrard Neale at 12 Downing street.

Iraq (Exports)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister when he was first informed of the 1988 amendments to the 1985 Howe guidelines for defence-related exports to Iraq. [18538]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

The first time that my right hon. Friend learnt that a change in the guidelines had been considered in 1988 was in a minute from his private secretary dated 13 November 1992.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *169*, if he will approach the companies and individuals to which he refers to ascertain whether they are prepared for their names to be disclosed. [18536]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

No.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to implement the recommendation made at page 1797 of the Scott report on the use of intelligence by Government Departments. [18530]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the speech made by my right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade on 26 February, *Official Report*, column *589*.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Prime Minister which officials from which Departments contributed to the preparation of the press briefing issued by the Cabinet Office on 15 February; what guidance they were given in regard to the matters within the Scott report on which to produce a digest and commentary; which recommendations by Sir Richard Scott according to the digest have already been accepted; and when these recommendations will be implemented. [18554]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

Successive Governments have not disclosed the nature or the specific sources of the advice that they receive from the civil service on their discussions with them. The Government's proposals in response to the recommendations of the Scott report were set out in the speech made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, on 26 February, *Official Report*, columns *589–604*.

Export Control Licences

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out Her Majesty's Government's definition of lethal and non-lethal military equipment as used in the consideration of export control licences. [18552]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

Any defence equipment which was designed to kill would clearly fall within the category of lethal equipment. Other equipment has to be considered individually according to its nature and specifications.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Officials (Interests)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the officials in his Department who have declared a current interst; what requirements are placed on officials to declare relevant interests; in what form records of such declarations are kept; and if he will establish a central register of officials's interests. [16890]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Civil servants faced with a conflict of interest are required to declare their interst to senior line management so that a decision can be taken on how best to proceed. These rules are set out in section A10.1 of the Scottish Office staff handbook.

Staff who disclose a relevant interest do so on the understanding that the declaration, like all employment matters, is confidential between them and their employer.

We do not plan to establish a central register of officials' interests.

Invest in Britain Bureau

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many inward investment projects have settled in Scotland as a result of guidance given by the Invest in Britain Bureau over the past three years; and if he will make a statement [17731]

Mr. Kynoch: Locate in Scotland works in close co-operation with the Invest in Britain Bureau and it is therefore very difficult to categorise specific projects as projects which came to Scotland as a result of involvement by IBB.

In the three years to March 1995, Locate in Scotland helped to attract to Scotland a total of 257 inward investment projects involving planned investment of over £2 billion and the expected creation or safeguarding of more than 31,000 jobs.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representation Scotland has on the Invest in Britain Bureau; and if he will make a statement. [17768]

Mr. Kynoch: The Invest in Britain Bureau is a division of the Department of Trade and Industry and Locate in Scotland works in close co-operation with it. Both IBB and LIS are represented on the committee on overseas promotion, which is an interdepartmental committee which exists to co-ordinate the UK's inward investment activity and, in particular, to ensure that the activities of individual bodies are complementary and incremental to the overall UK effort.

Chungwha Picture Tubes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost of the package offered by his Department to Chungwha Picture Tubes; and if he will make a statement. [17736]

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West on 29 November 1995 at column *580*.

Fire Brigades

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many incidents the fire brigades in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland attended in (i) 1980, (ii) 1994 and (iii) 1995. [18052]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is given in the table. Data for 1994 are provisional and for 1995 are not yet available.

Incidents attended by local authority fire brigades in (a) Strathclyde and (b) Scotland and in (i) 1980 and (ii) 1994

Year	*(a) Strathclyde*	*(b) Scotland*
1980[1]	32,896	64,235
1994[2]	66,172	121,483

[1] Includes estimates for periods of industrial action when data were not recorded.

[2] Provisional data which comprise fire incidents attended between January and December 1994 and special service incidents attended between April 1994 and March 1995.

Fire Services

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review his allocation of funds to the fire services consequent on the formation of the new local government unitary authorities; and if he will make a statement. [18053]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The allocation of revenue funding to the fire service in Scotland is a matter for local authorities. As to capital allocations, in consequence of the reorganisation of local government there will be a separate programme for fire service capital allocations, starting at a level significantly about average spending in previous years.

Retail Premises Burglaries

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many retail premises burglaries in *(a)* Inverclyde and *(b)* Strathclyde resulted in a conviction in each of the past five years. [18050]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information held by the Scottish Office covers only recorded crimes of housebreaking for all non-domestic property and convictions where housebreaking was the main offence. It is not possible, therefore, to provide the information requested.

Young People (Full-Time Education)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many men and women aged between 16 and 18 years in *(a)* Inverclyde and *(b)* Strathclyde are in full-time education; and if he will give the figures (i) in real terms and (ii) as a percentage of the total number of 16 to 18-year-olds in *(a)* and *(b)*. [18051]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information for 1994–95 is:

Number and percentage of men and women aged between 16 and 18 attending schools on a full time basis in 1994–95 by locality of school

Schools	*Inverclyde*			*Strathclyde*		
	Males	*Females*	*Total*	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
EA/GA Secondary	557	567	1,124	13,843	14,104	27,947
EA/GA Special	9	6	15	352	257	609
Independent	28	50	78	969	844	1,813
Total	594	623	1,217	15,164	15,205	30,369
Population	1,679	1,561	3,240	41,712	40,295	82,007
Percentage of the population	35.4	39.9	37.6	36.4	37.7	37.0

The number of people in schools is based on the locality of the school, rather than the domicile of the pupils.

Number and percentage of men and women aged between 16 and 18 attending full time at further education institutions in 1994–95, by permanent home location of student.

	Renfrew division			*Strathclyde*		
	Males	*Females*	*Total*	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
Further educational institutions						
Higher education vocational	184	211	395	1,309	1,502	2,811
Further education	407	432	839	3,145	2,877	6,022
Total	591	643	1,234	4,454	4,379	8,833
Population	3,748	3,437	7,185	41,712	40,295	82,007
Percentage of the population	15.8	18.7	17.2	10.7	10.9	10.8

Information for students in Inverclyde is included within the Renfrew Division. Separate data for Inverclyde are not available.
Higher Education institutions—information is not readily available.

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many private finance initiative schemes have now been agreed in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland. [18042]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Contracts have been signed for 20 private finance initiative schemes for services within my responsibility, with a total estimated initial capital value of more than £75 million. Nine of these schemes are in Strathclyde. Their total estimated initial capital value is £29 million.

Psychiatric Beds

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many psychiatric beds have closed in each year since 1980–81 in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland. [18049]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of beds closed is not centrally available. The pace of change in this sector is directed by patient needs. The organisation of long-stay care and community services are determined by continuous assessment of local needs involving health boards and local authorities. The aim is to secure the most effective package of services, both in hospital and in the community, that meet the specific needs of patients and carers.

The table shows the net average available staffed psychiatric beds available as at 31 March from 1981 to the latest available year.

Year	*Scotland*	*Strathclyde*
1981	16,953	8,004
1982	16,765	7,952
1983	16,569	7,852
1984	16,444	7,721
1985	16,463	7,766
1986	16,197	7,567
1987	15,820	7,253
1988	15,508	7,017
1989	14,973	6,791
1990	14,407	6,598
1991	13,927	6,358
1992	13,251	5,951
1993	12,561	5,594
1994	11,727	5,203
1995	11,034	4,881

Notes:

1. Comprises specialities of mental illness, psychogeriatrics, child psychiatry and adolescent psychiatry.

2. Includes beds in joint-user and contractual hospitals. Joint-user hospitals are local authority institutions in which accommodation is made available to health boards in terms of the sixth schedule of the National Assistance Act, 1948. Contractual hospitals are institutions where health boards have customer arrangements with voluntary bodies for the use of beds.

3. Strathclyde information comprises Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire health board areas.

Source:

Information and Statistics Division, NHS in Scotland.

Young People (Crime Statistics)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of convictions in *(a)* Inverclyde and *(b)* Strathclyde involved 16 to 24-year-olds in each of the last five years; and what was the year-on-year percentage change in this figure. [18056]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is set out in the table. High Court cases are not separately identifiable by location within the Scottish Office criminal proceedings database.

Persons with a charge proved in Greenock sheriff court and Inverclyde district court, 1990–94

Year	*Persons aged 16–24 with a charge proved*	*Total persons with a charge proved*[1]	*16–24 year olds with a charge proved as a percentage of all persons with a charge proved*	*Year on year percentage change in number of persons aged 16–24 with a charge proved*
1990	1,462	3,562	41.0	—
1991	1,188	3,041	39.1	–18.7
1992	1,380	3,252	42.4	16.2
1993	1,319	3,251	40.6	–4.4
1994	1,281	3,109	41.2	–2.9

[1] Includes companies and persons whose age is not known (for example the 1994 total of persons with a charge proved includes 24 persons with age unknown and 8 companies).

Persons with a charge proved in all sheriff and district courts[1] in Strathclyde Region, 1990–1994

Year	*Persons aged 16–24 with a charge proved*	*Total persons with a charge proved*[2]	*16–24 year olds with a charge proved as a percentage of all persons with a charge proved*	*year on year percentage change in number of persons aged 16–24 with a charge proved*
1990	34,904	78,136	44.7	—
1991	30,913	73,839	41.9	–11.4
1992	32,450	77,232	42.0	5.0
1993	29,439	70,805	41.6	–9.3
1994	28,556	70,837	40.3	–3.0

[1] Includes Stipendiary Magistrates Courts in Glasgow.

[2] Includes companies and persons whose age is not known (for example the 1994 total for persons with a charge proved includes 1,297 persons with age unknown and 302 companies).

General Practitioner Fundholders

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take against general practitioner fundholders who overspend on the allocation given to them. [18439]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In cases where a general practitioner fundholding practice spends in excess of its allotted sum it is for the relevant health board to review the reasons for the overspend and to take any action required.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which general practitioner fundholders in Scotland *(a)* overspent and *(b)* underspent their budgets in each year for which there are figures; what was the overspend or underspend in each case; and what were the total sums overspent and underspent in Scotland in each year. [18438]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Spending details of individual general practitioner fundholders in Scotland are not held centrally; however, information is collected on a health board basis. This is set out in the table.

£000

Health board	1991–92		1992–93		1993–94		1994–95	
	Under-spend	Over-spend	Under-spend	Over-spend	Under-spend	Over-spend	Under-spend	Over-spend
Argyll and Clyde	56	—	—	—	55	—	214	—
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—	—	—	330	—	214	43
Borders	—	—	—	—	65	—	291	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	—	—	76	—
Fife	—	—	—	—	96	—	150	—
Forth Valley	—	—	—	—	23	—	101	40
Grampian	103	98	95	4.8	551	279	1,207	452
Greater Glasgow	—	—	13	—	185	—	888	—
Highland	—[1]	—	—	—	87	—	—	130
Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	458	—	1,360	—
Lothian	29	—	39	—	354	—	868	264
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	—	26	12	—	278	172	363	120
Western Isles	—	—	—	—[1]	—	—	—	—
Scotland	188	35.8	159	4.8	2,482	451	5,732	1,049

Scottish Pre-School Play Association

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure the Scottish Pre-School Play Association is grant aided to an extent no less than similar groups elsewhere in the United Kingdom. [17539]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In providing grants to voluntary organisations under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 we are bound to take account of the resources available for that programme and the range of demands on it. We have funded the Scottish Pre-School Play Association to the fullest extent possible within available resources. We have made available a grant of £140,000 for 1996–97. This represents an increase of over 85 per cent. in two years, making SPPA the most highly core-funded organisation of all the children's organisations which receive section 10 support.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which serving civil servants in his Department are directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18147]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office members of staff who hold non-executive directorships are listed. As a requirement, and in order to avoid personal financial interest, official do not receive fees for their directorships; where these are offered, they are surrendered to central Scottish Office funds.

A. W. Denham: The Wise Group

D. Y. A. McFadyen: United Distillers plc

I. McCall: Scottish Design

R. S. B. Gordon: Incorporation of Goldsmiths

R. Brodie: Scottish Universities Law Institute[1]

C. C. MacDonald: TSB Scotland plc[2]

P. Wright: Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research

W. A. MacGregor: Strathclyde Greenbelt Company

G. Rooney: Local Investing Networking Co. Ltd.

D. Hamilton: Castlemilk Partnership Team Ltd.

B. R. Morgan: Castlemilk Partnership Team Ltd.

D. Belfall: Castlemilk Partnership Team Ltd.

D. Belfall: Wester Hailes Partnership Co. Ltd.

D. Hart: Wester Hailes Partnership Co. Ltd.

D. Hart: Fergusile Park Training, Economic and Enterprise Development Co. Ltd.

D. Hart: Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum

[1] Fees paid within £1-£5,000

[2] Fees paid within £5,000–£10,000

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18635]

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Forests (Common Grazings)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which forests in the highland region, Argyll and the western isles were planted on former crofting common grazings. [19153]

Mr. Kynoch: The Forestry Commission does not keep a central record of this information, which could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Forestry Commission

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which department of the Forestry Commission in Scotland was responsible for land purchases between *(a)* 1966 and 1970, *(b)* 1971 and 1980 and *(c)* 1981 and 1990. [19152]

Mr. Kynoch: The forestry commissioners were responsible for decisions on land purchase during these periods.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the land currently owned by the Forestry Commission and *(b)* the estates owned by the Scottish Office, indicating which of these (i) are on the market for sale and (ii) can be affected by the right of feudal pre-emption. [19150]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is as follows:

(a) Lists of Forestry Commission woodlands in England, Scotland and Wales are in the Library.

(b) A list of the Scottish Office crofting estates is given in annexe A of the recently issued consultation paper on crofting trusts, a copy of which is in the Library. There are a further 17 lowland Scottish Office estates comprising a total of 452 hectares.

(i) A list of the Forestry Commission woodlands which are currently on the market for sale was given in my answer to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 18 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *773–76*. None of the Scottish Office estates is currently on the market for sale.

(ii) Information on which of the Forestry Commission and Scottish Office land could be affected by the feudal right of pre-emption could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the sales of Forestry Commission land from 1980 and 1989, and 1990 to 1996 by *(a)* area, *(b)* prices obtained, *(c)* location and *(d)* date of sale. [19181]

Mr. Kynoch: Lists of land sold by the Forestry Commission between the introduction of the commission's disposals programme in July 1981 and December 1994 are in the Library of the House. A list of the sales in 1995 is in preparation and will be placed in the Library shortly.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much of the Forestry Commission's annual budget in Scotland, expressed in *(a)* monetary value and *(b)* percentages was expended on land purchases each year from 1966 to 1991 inclusive. [19151]

Mr. Kynoch: The commission's annual reports and accounts, which are available in the Library, record the areas of land suitable for planting which the commission bought each year in Britain and their average cost. There is no separate record of the cost of the acquisitions in Scotland.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in how many sales by the Forestry Commission the right of feudal pre-emption was applied in *(a)* 1980 to 1989 and *(b)* 1990 to 1996. [19182]

Mr. Kynoch: The Forestry Commission does not keep a central record of this information, which could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any items accepted in lieu of inheritance tax have been allocated in Scotland since he last made an announcement. [19484]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am pleased to announce that I am allocating the painting "The Return from the Flight into Egypt" by the 16th century artist Paris Bordone to the national galleries of Scotland. The painting has been accepted in lieu of tax arising from the death of Colonel W J Stirling of Keir.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of recipients receiving family credit *(a)* in Wales, *(b)* in Mid Glamorgan and *(c)* in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. [17929]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 4 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the latest estimate of the number of recipients receiving Family Credit *(a)* in Wales, *(b)* in Mid Glamorgan and *(c)* in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are not kept which are specific to Mid Glamorgan, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney but are available for Benefits Agency Offices. The figures have been produced by a computer scan and the latest available is for 10 November 1995. The figures are provisional and subject to change.

	Families in receipt of Family Credit
Wales	38,247
Mid Glamorgan[1]	6,722
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney Benefit Offices	1,491

[1] The figure for Mid Glamorgan has been compiled using figures for the Benefit Offices at Aberdare, Bargoed, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Pontypridd, Porth and Tonypandy.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons individuals who have detachment orders have received arrears notices from the Child Support Agency when their employers have failed to pay the CSA. [17706]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. John Heppell, dated 4 March 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the issues of Child Support Agency arrears notices.

You asked about the issue of arrears notices by the Agency where an absent parent's method of payment is by Deduction of Earnings Order (DEO). The reason such notices are currently issued is that employers, even when complying with a DEO, can vary the date of their payments; but arrears notices are issued automatically to the absent parent by the Child Support Computer System (CSCS) when payments are more than eight days late.

The Agency has recognised that this process needs to be amended where a DEO is in force and the employer is complying with it. In April 1996, CSCS will be updated and enhanced. As part of this enhancement CSCS will no longer issue arrears notices to absent parents whose method of payment is DEO. Instead, a monthly

analysis will be introduced to identify those cases where the absent parent's employer has not operated the DEO correctly. The Agency will follow these up with the employer concerned.

I hope this is helpful.

Departmental Advertising and Public Relations

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the total spending by his Department on advertising and public relations in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96; and if he will list the major advertising campaigns executed or planned indicating the expenditure on each. [18252]

Mr. Burt: The information is as follows:

1993–94: £5,964,988

1994–95: £3,596,508

1995–96[1]: £4,400,000

[1] Estimated figure to the end of the year.

The above figures are for advertising only and include expenditure by the Department's executive agencies. The Department does not incur expenditure on public relations.

The major[1] adverting campaigns, executed and planned by this Department and its agencies are as follows:

Campaign title	*Amount ex VAT* £
1993–94	
Family Credit	2,629,664
Child Support Agency Campaign	47,835
Disability Working Allowance	680,850
Disability Anti-Discrimination Campaign	254,468
Industrial Injuries to Coalminers	258,723
1994–95	
Child Support Agency Campaign	180,353
Disability Anti-Discrimination Campaign	764,883
Pensions	153,191
Working with Benefits	1,715,744
Disability Working Allowance	212,765
1995–96	
Working with Benefits	1,962,090
Pensions	851,063
Disability Working Allowance	212,765
Disability Act	191,691

Some aspects of the 1995–96 costs have yet to be finalised.[1] The term "major" has been defined as campaigns costing more than £100,000.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what modifications have been made to his Department's computers to accommodate bringing the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996, into effect; and what other costs have been incurred in respect of their implementation. [19112]

Mr. Roger Evans: The introduction of this legislation has not required modification to any of the Benefits Agency's computer systems.

Details of other costs involved are set out in the table:

Information on additional costs arising from the introduction of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996 for 1995–96

Benefit	*Staffing cost*[1] £	*Non-staffing cost*[2] £
Disability Living Allowance/ Attendance Allowance	316,662	619,300
Disability Working Allowance	none	none
Family Credit	71,721	689,459
Income Support	none	none
Invalid Care Allowance	11,417	36,500
Severe Disablement Allowance	77,516	62,109
Total	477,316	1,407,368

[1] Reflects the additional administration costs arising from the introduction of this legislation.

[2] Reflects the costs arising from the development and delivery of training to operational staff; the redesign and printing of revised claim forms; the development and distribution of revised procedural guidance.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants have been refused benefit under the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996 because *(a)* their cases have been determined since 5 February and *(b)* they did not claim asylum at the port; and how many of these cases involve children. [19116]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines he has issued to local authorities in respect of the implementation of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996 with particular reference to children. [19117]

Mr. Evans: The Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996 came into force on 5 February 1996. Guidance to accompany the amending regulations was issued by this Department to all local authorities in January 1996, in advance of the implementation date. The guidance does not specifically refer to children as the new arrangements do not affect social service departments' responsibilities under the Children Act 1989.

Residential Care

Mr. MacGregor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many family homes were sold in the last year for which figures are available to help pay for nursing home and other residential long-term care. [17772]

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not available centrally.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further measures he proposes to introduce to reduce the level of benefit fraud. [19338]

Mr. Lilley: As part of the five-year security strategy which I announced last July, and in the light of the results of benefit reviews of income support and housing benefit which suggest that around 10 per cent. of benefit claims are fraudulent, I propose;

(a) to double to 600,000 the number of home visits to check new claims for entitlement and review existing ones.

(b) to increase cross-checking of information about benefit claimant, both within DSS and with local authorities through a new computerised housing benefit central register, to detect fraud.

(c) to introduce from this autumn the benefit payment card which will virtually eliminate fraud in the payment system.

(d) to initiate a series of month-long local anti-fraud drives in major urban areas round the country, designed to give people who have just drifted into abusing the benefit system the chance to put their claim right and to catch those who choose not to do so. The drives will be preceded by two weeks of intensive local publicity, leading up to the launch of a "freephone" hotline to tell DSS staff in confidence about suspected fraud; local data-matching exercises; increased numbers of visits to claimants; use of bar-code scanners in post-office to detect stolen order books; and special drives on categories of employers and self-employed likely to be involved in benefit fraud.

(e) to launch three initiatives involving local authorities. First, a study of a unified computer system to share information with the Benefits Agency, which would help prevent housing benefit fraud. Secondly, a study looking at how best to prevent fraudulent housing benefit claims from entering the system, through improved, standardised methods and checks. Thirdly, encouraging local authorities to set up teams to work alongside the Benefits Agency to tackle organised housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud, sharing the expertise of the Benefits Agency in this field.

(f) to establish the benefit fraud investigation service on 1 April, through the merger of Employment Service and Benefits Agency security staff. About 1,100 Employment Service investigators will join the Benefits Agency.

I expect these changes to contribute to a new target for savings from anti-fraud activities of £1.5 billion in 1996–97.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations the British high commission in Lagos made to other European embassies in Lagos regarding action to be taken by European Governments over the death sentence passed on Ken Saro-Wiwa; [18595]

(2) what discussions the British high commission in Lagos had with other European embassies in Lagos regarding the death sentence passed on Ken Saro-Wiwa. [18594]

Mr. Hanley: The British high commission in Lagos has regular meetings with European partners in Lagos. We consult closely on a wide range of human rights issues and continue to monitor the situation closely.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's plan to raise the violation of human rights in Nigeria at *(a)* the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and *(b)* other inter-governmental conferences; and if he will support at the Commission on Human Rights the creation of a special rapporteur on violations of human rights in Nigeria. [18470]

Mr. Hanley: We are working with our EU and Commonwealth partners to secure a resolution on Nigeria at the UN Commission on Human Rights, including the appointment of a special rapporteur. In addition, we are members of the Commonwealth ministerial action group, which is considering a range of options to ensure that Nigeria takes steps to respect human rights.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of States for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the British high commissioner in Nigeria has made to the Nigerian Government relating to the judicial process faced by the 19 Ogonis currently on trial for murder. [18472]

Mr. Hanley: Our high commissioner has repeatedly made it clear to senior Nigerian Ministers that the international community expects the 19 Ogonis facing trial to be brought before a properly constituted court that respects their basic legal rights.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* in co-operation with other Commonwealth countries to promote the improvement of human rights in Nigeria. [18471]

Mr. Hanley: We are working with our EU and Commonwealth partners to secure a resolution on Nigeria at the UN Commission on Human Rights, including the appointment of a special rapporteur. In addition, we are members of the Commonwealth ministerial action group, which is considering a range of options to ensure that Nigeria takes steps to respect human rights.

National Resources Institute

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what future progress there has been in deciding the future ownership of the National Resources Institute. [19551]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I announced on 14 December that final bids for the NRI were being invited from three groups. Two final bids were received. Following detailed consideration of these in relation to the Government's objectives for the transfer, I have decided to give preferred bidder status to a consortium of the university of Edinburgh, the university of Greenwich, Imperial college of science, technology and medicine and Wye college of the university of London. Subject to the satisfactory conclusion of negotiations, I intend that the NRI should transfer to the new owners as soon as practicable.

Iraq

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring of food and humanitarian aid by British or multilateral agencies has taken place in Iraq. [19059]

Mr. Hanley: Food and humanitarian aid is monitored by the Overseas Development Administration through visits to northern Iraq and through regular reporting by non-governmental organisations and multilateral agencies working in Iraq. The ODA also funds monitoring of multilateral water and sanitation projects in Baghdad-controlled Iraq.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effects of sanctions on the health of the population of Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [19058]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Food and medicines are exempt from sanctions. However, Saddam Hussein's refusal either to comply with the requirements of relevant UN Security Council resolutions or to spend enough of the regime's resources on humanitarian supplies has caused much suffering in Iraq. He has also so far refused to implement UN Security Council resolution 986, which would allow the sale of Iraqi oil for humanitarian supplies, bringing much-needed relief to millions of Iraqis. Since 1991, we have provided £73 million of humanitarian aid to Iraq.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current value of Iraqi assets frozen in Britain; what the value was in 1991; and if he will make a statement. [19110]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The value of Iraqi assets on 1 January 1991 was US$1,363 million. The value at the end of September 1995, the latest figures available, was US$769 million. The figures for the value of Iraqi deposits in UK banks include private as well as Iraqi Government assets. Iraqi assets are frozen under the provisions of UN Security Council resolution 661, which was adopted on 6 August 1990.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts have been established with representatives of parties in northern Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [19057]

Mr. Davis: We maintain regular contacts with all the main parties in northern Iraq. We welcome the continuing ceasefire between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdish Democratic party, and support efforts to achieve a lasting agreement that has the backing of the parties in northern Iraq.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he had with the Secretary to the Cabinet concerning the Government's response to the Scott inquiry; and where and when such consultations took place. [16606]

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* Successive Governments have not disclosed the nature of the specific sources of the advice they receive from the civil service.

Asia House

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Government funding has been given to support the work of Asia House. [18567]

Mr. David Davis: None, but the Government fully support the work of Asia House and works closely with the organisers to promote the project. In particular, the Deputy Prime Minister will soon host a reception in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to mark the project's launch.

British Military Equipment (Exports)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries currently subject to embargoes on the export of British military equipment; when in each case the embargo was imposed; which equipment is covered; and if he will make a statement. [18742]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) on 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *426–27*, which lists the embargoes we currently apply and the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 30 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *654–55*, which gives details of the equipment covered by each of these embargoes. For ease of reference, the following is a list of embargoes and the date of their imposition:

Country	*Date of imposition*
United Nations embargoes	
Iraq	6 August 1990
Libya	31 March 1992[1]
Somalia	23 January 1992
Liberia	19 November 1992
UNITA[2] (Angola)	15 September 1993
Rwanda[3]	17 May 1994
Former Yugoslavia[4]	25 September 1991
EU embargoes	
China	26 June 1989
Burma	9 July 1991
Zaire	7 April 1993
Sudan	15 March 1994
Nigeria[5]	11 November 1995
Former Yugoslavia[4]	26 February 1996
National embargoes	
Iran	1 March 1993
Argentina	5 April 1982
Voluntary embargoes agreed by the (then) Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)	
Armenia	28 February 1992
Azerbaijan	28 February 1992

[1] Came into force is April 1992.

[2] In the case of Angola, there is a mandatory embargo on UNITA. However, UN Security Council 976 of February 1995, calls on both parties to cease any acquisition of arms and war material during the presence in Angola of the UN Peacekeeping Force, UNAVEM III.

[3] In the case of Rwanda, Security Council resolution 1011 of 16 August 1995, decided that restrictions imposed by paragraph 13 of resolution 918 (1994) shall not apply with regard to the sale or supply of arms and related material to the Government of Rwanda.

[4] For the Former Yugoslavia: UN Security Council resolution 1021 of 22 November 1995 established a timetable for phased lift of the arms embargo. Specific details of this can be found in Official Report Lords Column WA71 of 24 January 1996. This has been followed by the adoption of a Common Position on the Former Yugoslavia by the EU on 26 February 1996 at the Foreign Affairs Council.

[5] In the case of Nigeria, the PM announced a UK arms embargo on 11 November. The EU-wide arms embargo against the Nigerian regime came into effect from 20 November 1995.

Winston Churchill Speech, Missouri

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Winston Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri; and if he will make a statement. [16854]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: A series of events to mark the 50th anniversary of Sir Winston Churchill's speech is being planned by Westminster college in Fulton, Missouri, in collaboration with the Churchill memorial and the international Churchill societies. Baroness Thatcher will speak at the college before a banquet in the room where Sir Winston gave his address. Her Majesty's Government will be represented by the British consul-general from Chicago. There are no plans for any separate commemorations by Her Majesty's Government.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to recall the Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands; and if he will make a statement. [18945]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The original petition to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary from members of the Legislative Council in the Turks and Caicos Islands, requesting the governor's removal, was received in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Monday 4 March. It is being studied and a response will be issued in due course.

Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of which other signatory states to the European convention on human rights maintain similar laws and practices to those where the United Kingdom has been found in breach. [18971]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No such assessment has been made following findings of breach. Finding of a violation relates to the particular circumstances of the individual case and binds the state concerned. In preparing their response in particular cases, the Government not infrequently draw on a comparative analysis of law and practice in other Council of Europe countries where they are similar to the matter under challenge.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which United Kingdom embassies or high commissions have assisted, funded or commissioned events or meetings of publications to put the case for Northern Ireland being part of the United Kingdom; and what plans he has to (i) expand and (ii) initiate innovative and pro-active programmes to make the case for the Union abroad. [18972]

Mr. Rifkind: British missions overseas undertake a wide variety of proactive work in disseminating and explaining British Government policy on Northern Ireland, which includes our commitment to Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom as long as a greater number of its population so wish. Examples of such work are: regular briefing of host Governments, media and other contacts; dissemination of detailed background information, including video and radio material; arranging visits to Northern Ireland by public or press figures to increase their understanding; and arranging overseas visits by British Ministers who take the opportunities to explain Government policy on Northern Ireland.

Contributing to a clearer understanding overseas of Northern Ireland remains a high priority for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, its embassies and high commissions.

EU Council (meeting)

Mr. Garnier: to ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union. [19444]

Mr. David Davis: The following Councils are scheduled:

4 March: Environment
5 March: Environment
9 March: Foreign Affairs Council (Informal)
10 March: Foreign Affairs Council (Informal)
11 March: Transport
11 March: Ecofin
18 March: Agriculture
19 March: Agriculture
19 March: Justice/Home Affairs
20 March: Justice/Home Affairs
21 March: Telecoms
25 March: Research
25 March: Foreign Affairs Council
26 March: Foreign Affairs Council
28 March: Industry Council
29 March: Social Affairs Council
29 March: European Council

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

4/5 MARCH: ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

"A" Points

As advised by council secretariat.

"B" Points

Preparation of 4th session of Commission on Sustainable Development (Council conclusions)

Draft Directive on Biocides (orientation debate on annexes)

Draft Hazardous Waste Shipment Regulation (possible common position)

Draft Classification, Packaging and Labelling of Dangerous Substances Directive (possible common position)

Draft Directive on Emissions of Off-road Machinery (orientation debate)

Open debate on Wetlands (Council conclusions)

Draft revised regulation on Leghold Traps (lunchtime orientation debate)

CO_2 from Cars (exchange of views on Commission communication)

Community strategy on the Ozone Layer (Council conclusions)

Adoption of negotiating mandate for protocol to Barcelona Convention

Adoption of negotiating mandate for Paris Convention (PARCOM)

Draft Decision revising the Community's 5th Action Programme on the environment and sustainable development (presentation by the Commission)

Joint meeting with Ministers from Central and Eastern Europe.

9/10 MARCH: FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL (INFORMAL)

Agenda not yet available.

11 MARCH: ECOFIN

"A" Points

As advised by council secretariat.

"B" Points

Convergence Programmes (possibly)

Contractual Netting Directive (possibly)

Council Regulation on Community action in the field of statistics

Discharge of the Budget and Court of Auditors' report for 1994

Court of Auditors' Special Report on the Reliability of the Expenditure for 1994

Commission's report on the implementation of the Court of Auditors' recommendation and of the Council's remarks for the Budget for 1993.

11 MARCH: TRANSPORT

"A" Points

As advised by Council Secretariat.

"B" Points

Aviation relations with US (debate)

Negotiations with Switzerland (Commission progress report)

Trans-European Networks (debate)

Directive on harmonisation of vehicle tests (largely consolidation of existing measures—common position)

Inland waterways liberalisation, state aid rules and scrapping scheme (common position)

Aviation statistics regulation (for agreement by simple majority).

18–19 MARCH: AGRICULTURE COUNCIL

"A" Points

As advised by Council Secretariat.

"B" Points

Reform of the fruit and vegetable regime (possibly)

Reform of the wine regime (possibly)

Price fixing

Geographical indications (possibly)

Amendment to Directive 64/432 on trade in animals (possibly)

Plant health—solidarity and responsibility (possibly)

Veal crates (possibly)

Hormones (possibly)

Inspection fees (possibly)

Pesticides (possibly)

Equivalence Agreements (possibly)

Amendment to Directive 90/675 on controls on imports (possibly)

Amendment to Directive 72/462 on equivalence (possibly)

Intra Community inspection fees (possibly)

Amendment to 90/524 on feeding stuffs (possibly)

19–20 MARCH: JUSTICE/HOME AFFAIRS

Agenda not yet available.

21 MARCH: TELECOMS

"A" Points

As advised by Council Secretariat.

"B" Points

Directive on interconnection in telecommunications with regard to ensuring universal service and interoperability through applications of the principles of Open Network Provision (ONP):

Common position (possibly).

/Decision

Decision on action at Community level in the filed of satellite personal communications services in the EU:

Orientation debate.

Directive on a common framework for licensing of telecoms services:

Progress report.

Directive adapting Directives 90/387/EEC and 92/44/EEC for a competitive environment in telecommunications:

Progress report.

Directive on common rules for the development of community postal services and the improvement of quality service:

Progress report.

Council Resolution on the future development of the market for directories and other information services in a liberalised environment (possibly).

Commission Communication on universal service in telecoms (possibly):

Commission presentation.

25 MARCH: RESEARCH COUNCIL

"A" Points

As advised by Council Secretariat.

"B" Points

Decision adapting the fourth framework of programmes of activities in the field of research, technological development and demonstration for the European Community and European Atomic Energy Community:

Orientation debate.

Communication on International Co-operation:

Orientation debate

Council Conclusions (possibly).

Cooperation with Mediterranean countries (follow up to Barcelona Conference):

Debate.

Green Paper on Innovation:

Debate.

Joint meeting with Central and Eastern European countries:

Debate.

25–26 MARCH: FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Agenda not yet available.

28 MARCH: INDUSTRY COUNCIL

"A" Points

As advised by Council Secretariat.

"B" Points

SMEs:

Conclusions on co-ordination of Community programmes in favour of SMEs;

Presentation of Commission's proposal for new multi-annual programme for SMEs.

Textiles;

Presentation of Commission communication on competitiveness of textile and clothing industry;

Conclusions on impact of international developments on EU textile and clothing sector.

Pharmaceuticals:

Resolution on competitiveness of EU pharmaceutical industry.

Defence Industry:

Presentation of Commission communication on competitiveness of defence industry.

Maritime Industry:

Presentation of Commission communication on competitiveness of maritime industry.

Research and Industry Task Force:

Commission progress report and discussion.

29 MARCH: SOCIAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

"A" Points

As advised by Council Secretariat.

"B" Points

Parental Leave:

Draft Directive endorsing social partners' agreement.

Draft Directive on Postal Workers.

Draft Council Recommendation on the Balanced Participation of Men and Women in Decision-Making.

Commission Communication on the Future of Social Protection:

Open Debate.

Commission Report on the Demographic Situation.

Commission Communication on the Fight against Racism and Xenophobia.

Draft Decision on Essen Programme.

Draft Decision on SAFE (health and safety) Programme.

Draft Decision on Older People Programme.

29 MARCH: EUROPEAN COUNCIL

Formal Opening of IGC.

Agenda not yet available.

Niaz Ahmed

Mr. Max Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, when the application by Mr. Niaz Ahmed (Ref: IMM/C8853) to join his wife in the United Kingdom was referred to his Department for inquiries to be made in the United Kingdom; on what date the request was received by his Department; when he expects to make a recommendation; and if he will make a statement. [18469]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

I understand that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office informed the hon. Member on 7 February that this application has not been referred to the Home Office. That remains the case.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Enterprise and Higher Education Initiative

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total expenditure in *(a)* actual and *(b)* current prices on the enterprise and higher education initiative in each year since 1988; how many higher education institutions have participated in the initiative; and what was the total funding per higher education institution. [17661]

Mr. Forth: The total figure for expenditure on the enterprise in higher education initiative in Great Britain is £60 million. It is not possible at this time to give year on year figures for Great Britain but those for England and Wales are given.

All prices £000

Year	*Cash prices*	*Current prices*[1]
1988–89	600	800
1989–90	2,300	2,960
1990–91	5,500	6,550
1991–92	8,700	9,750
1992–93	11,500	12,390
1993–94	9,300	9,740
1994–95	7,730	7,940
1995–96	[2]4,650	4,650
Totals	[3]50,280	54,780

[1] Calculated using the GPD Deflators.

[2] This is the budget for the year.

[3] This excludes the six Scottish universities which participated for whom responsibility and funds were transferred to the Scottish Office.

54 higher education institutions in England and Wales were involved and the average funding per institution was £931,000 at cash prices or £1,014,000 at current prices.

Special Educational Needs Tribunals

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average length of time between the lodging of an appeal to a special education needs tribunal and the hearing of the appeal by the tribunal. [18068]

Mrs. Gillan: The average length of time between the lodging of an appeal to the special educational needs tribunal and the hearing of the appeal is five months.

Further details are in the SEN tribunal president's annual report, a copy of which is in the Library.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many appeals which have been lodged with the special educational needs tribunal are currently pending. [18093]

Mrs. Gillan: I understand that some 800 appeals which have been lodged with the special educational needs tribunal are currently pending.

I have asked the president of the tribunal to write to the hon. Member with up-to-date figures for appeals.

Local Education Authorities (Costs)

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were *(a)* the numbers of staff and *(b)* the administrative costs incurred by each education authority in England for the year 1994–95. [18855]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows for each local education authority *(a)* the latest available full-time equivalent number of teaching and non-teaching staff as at June 1995; and *(b)* provisional administrative expenditure for 1994–95.

LEAs administration costs
Gross expenditure 1994–95

LEA	*Teaching and non-teaching staff*	*Administration costs (provisional) £000*
Corporation of London	492	n/a
Camden	n/a	7,705
Greenwich	4,125	n/a
Hackney	n/a	8,062
Hammersmith and Fulham	n/a	4,010
Islington	2,223	n/a
Kensington and Chelsea	1,284	2,735
Lambeth	3,503	11,588
Lewisham	3,499	n/a
Southwark	n/a	8,401
Tower Hamlets	n/a	n/a
Wandsworth	2,045	4,396
City of Westminster	1,974	n/a
Barking	2,695	3,281
Barnet	3,772	3,150
Bexley	n/a	3,731
Brent	n/a	4,304
Bromley	2,021	3,802
Croydon	3,889	3,929
Ealing	3,061	6,602
Enfield	3,355	6,379
Haringey	n/a	4,617
Harrow	2,489	n/a
Havering	n/a	3,096
Hillingdon	n/a	5,014
Hounslow	3,045	n/a
Kingston upon Thames	1,525	2,144
Merton	1,818	n/a
Newham	3,927	5,202
Redbridge	3,186	2,935
Richmond upon Thames	1,843	2,405
Sutton	1,836	4,744
Waltham Forest	3,178	8,935
Birmingham	15,406	18,724
Coventry	5,092	6,967
Dudley	n/a	3,808
Sandwell	4,283	4,726
Solihull	3,043	2,628
Walsall	4,504	4,563
Wolverhampton	4,009	n/a
Knowsley	2,607	3,541
Liverpool	n/a	n/a
St. Helens	2,806	2,309
Sefton	n/a	4,258
Wirral	5,171	5,457
Bolton	n/a	5,558
Bury	2,608	2,779
Manchester	8,518	8,420
Oldham	3,795	4,595
Rochdale	3,298	n/a
Salford	4,113	7,086
Stockport	3,718	3,659
Tameside	2,968	3,615
Trafford	3,007	1,733
Wigan	3,942	3,957
Barnsley	3,422	n/a
Doncaster	4,892	n/a
Rotherham	3,504	3,958
Sheffield	6,162	7,665
Bradford	8,087	7,736
Calderdale	n/a	n/a
Kirklees	6,192	8,631
Leeds	11,192	10,728
Wakefield	4,814	4,304
Gateshead	3,056	3,954
Newcastle upon Tyne	n/a	5,352
North Tyneside	n/a	1,583
South Tyneside	2,398	2,826
Sunderland	4,435	n/a

LEAs administration costs
Gross expenditure 1994–95

LEA	*Teaching and non-teaching staff*	*Administration costs (provisional) £000*
Isle of Scilly	[1]—	33
Avon	13,207	14,014
Bedfordshire	8,015	6,908
Berkshire	n/a	7,270
Buckinghamshire	7,328	14,029
Cambridgeshire	8,557	8,383
Cheshire	13,083	11,470
Cleveland	n/a	4,750
Cornwall	6,006	5,012
Cumbria	5,654	4,554
Derbyshire	12,822	5,518
Devon	n/a	9,226
Dorset	6,119	7,209
Durham	8,437	7,458
East Sussex	n/a	9,907
Essex	13,161	8,301
Gloucestershire	4,903	6,934
Hampshire	18,412	n/a
Hereford and Worcester	9,620	n/a
Hertfordshire	12,022	12,275
Humberside	15,607	14,307
Isle of Wight	1,647	3,636
Kent	n/a	30,198
Lancashire	19,599	22,798
Leicestershire	14,962	12,779
Lincolnshire	5,534	8,234
Norfolk	9,085	5,916
North Yorkshire	n/a	8,609
Northamtonshire	n/a	6,886
Northumberland	5,374	6,505
Nottinghamshire	13,464	n/a
Oxfordshire	7,477	8,848
Shropshire	5,349	n/a
Somerset	5,871	5,651
Staffordshire	15,358	3,310
Suffolk	9,213	6,992
Surrey	n/a	13,251
Warwickshire	6,585	n/a
West Sussex	8,795	10,950
Wiltshire	6,274	8,276

n/a = not yet available.
[1] Within Cornwall.

Higher Education (Funding)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the level of funding allocated by the Government to the Higher Education Funding Council for England in respect of indirect costs relating to research projects for each of the financial years from 1990–91 to 1994–95. [18661]

Mr. Forth: The Government notify the Higher Education Funding Council for England of a total figure for funding for teaching and research. The funding council advises on the split between resources for teaching and research and allocates block grant to institutions. Funding for research from the funding council is intended to contribute to the indirect costs associated with specific projects funded by the research councils and to support basic research undertaken at institutions' direction. Universities are expected to charge full costs to industrial and other sponsors of research.

The funding council was established under the provisions of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and assumed responsibility for paying grant to institutions on 1 April 1993. In the academic year 1993–94, it allocated a total of £618,150,500 for research. In 1994–95, that figure was £626,664,907. It is not possible to identify an element in respect of indirect costs.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils aged three and a half will lose their reception places under the Government's nursery voucher scheme. [18798]

Mr. Robin Squire: No three-year-old should lose a school place as a result of the nursery voucher scheme because there will be no deduction from resources local education authorities are currently making available for such places.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is *(a)* the estimated number of four-year-olds eligible, *(b)* the number of full-time equivalent places already available for (i) each existing category of provider and (ii) in total, *(c)* the additional number of full-time equivalent places expected from existing and new providers by category and total and *(d)* the estimated deficit or surplus number of places, in each of the areas of local education authorities participating in the voucher scheme for early age education. [19109]

Mr. Squire: The best estimates of the number of four-year-olds in January 1995, with and without a place in the maintained sector in each of the phase 1 local education authorities are given. Estimates of participation are less reliable when broken down by both year group and LEA area. The Department does not hold information on the number of places in the private and voluntary sectors.

LEA	*Estimated number of 4 year olds*	*Estimated number of 4 year olds without a place in the maintained sector in January 1995*	*Estimated number of 4 year olds in maintained provision at January 1995*
Wandsworth	3,300	700	2,600
Westminster	1,900	800	1,100
Kensington and Chelsea	1,650	850	800
Norfolk	9,300	3,000	6,300

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *280*, if she will estimate the shortfall in places available relative to the number of children whose parents require places under the nursery voucher scheme. [18942]

Mr. Squire: Based on estimated population and participation figures, some 145,000 four-year-olds in England were not in nursery education places in the maintained sector in January 1995. Many of these have places in the voluntary or private sectors.

Project Work

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what circumstances a claimant participating in a part-time education or training course will not be required to attend the compulsory work experience element of project work; and, where such attendance is, required, what protection will be afforded to the claimant's rights in respect of course attendance. [18752]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* Claimants who are participating in part-time education and training will not be exempted, for that reason, from the requirement to attend project work for a 21-hour week. Providers of work experience will be required, however, to tailor the pattern of hours in order to accommodate the claimant's studies.

Travel-to-interview Scheme

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place a copy of the review report on the travel-to-interview scheme and the date on which the report was based in the Library.[19102]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about placing a copy of the review report on the Travel to Interview Scheme and the raw data upon which the report was based in the House of Commons Library.

It is anticipated that a copy of the report will be placed in the House of Commons Library. Research reports are designed to be comprehensive in their content so it is not normal practice to place copies of the raw data in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people unemployed for between four and 13 weeks, by region, have applied for, and how many have been granted, assistance from the travel-to-interview scheme since its inception. [19100]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on how many people unemployed for between four and thirteen weeks, by region, have applied for, and how many have been granted, assistance from the Travel to Interview Scheme since its inception.

I am unable to provide the information you ask for, as my Jobcentres do not record how long people who apply for TIS have been unemployed. However, during a recent evaluation it was recorded that 26% of applications were from people unemployed for less than 13 weeks.

I hope this is helpful.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many days were taken to carry out European social fund audits on each TEC in Greater London. [18517]

Mr. Paice: Since September 1992, five visits have been carried out by auditors from the Department's ESF unit and from European institutions to TECs in Greater London looking specifically at European social fund activity. A total of 10 man days have been spent by Department staff on site visits, and a total of six days have been spent by European institution auditors.

In addition to the site visits, time has been spent on preparatory and follow-up work. The amount of time spent on this activity is not recorded on an individual case basis.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many different types of audit each TEC in Great Britain has undergone. [18519]

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils in England are private limited companies and, since they were established in 1990–91, they have been audited each year by their statutory auditors. They are also required to have an effective internal audit function.

Government office financial appraisal and monitoring teams check contract compliance regularly and each TEC is also subject to Government office audits on health and safety and quality assurance arrangements with its suppliers.

The Department's internal audit team also visits a small sample of TECs each year as part of a biennial examination of Government office expenditure. Their role is to provide the necessary assurance to the DFEE accounting officer that moneys voted by Parliament have been properly disbursed. They also undertake work on behalf of other Government Departments to minimise the number of different Government auditors visiting TECs.

The National Audit Office visits a small sample of TECs each year as part of its examination of the Department's appropriation account. The NAO may also from time to time pay visits to TECs as part of its wider role in researching, for example, value-for-money issues.

Where TECs are in receipt of funding from the European Commisison, they are under an obligation to grant access to representatives of the Commission of the European Court of Auditors to examine its records at any reasonable time. The Department also conducts specialised monitoring of TEC claims from the European social fund.

Responsibility for auditing arrangements for TECs in Wales and local enterprise councils in Scotland rests respectively with the Secretary of State for Wales and the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many days were taken to carry out quality and health and safety audits on each TEC in Greater London. [18516]

Mr. Paice: Government office for London staff spent 14 person days on quality and health and safety audits in each training and enterprise council in London.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many days were taken to carry out financial control audits on each TEC in Greater London. [18518]

Mr. Paice: The number of person days spent on financial controls audits in London training and enterprise councils during the last 12 months was as follows:

AZTEC: 216
CENTEC: 208
CILNTEC: 163
LETEC: 229
NLTEC: 169
NWLTEC: 186
SOLOTEC: 217
WLTEC: 261

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cost of carrying out European social fund audits on each of the Greater London TECs. [18520]

Mr. Paice: This information is not available.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of carrying out quality and health and safety audits on each of the Greater London TECs. [18514]

Mr. Paice: The estimated cost for each training and enterprise council of carrying out quality and health and safety audits during the last 12 months was £2,100.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of carrying out financial control audits on each of the Greater London TECs. [18515]

Mr. Paice: The estimated cost of carrying out financial control audits in each of the London training and enterprise councils during the last 12 months was as follows:

AZTEC: £27,000
CENTEC: £25,000
CILNTEC: £20,000
LETEC: £24,000
NLTEC: £17,000
NWLTEC: £23,000
SOLOTEC: £22,000
WLTEC: £31,000

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress Essex, North London and North West London training and enterprise councils, and Northamptonshire chamber of commerce, training and enterprise are making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [19337]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce the award of a three-year licence to Essex, North London and North West London training and enterprise councils and Northamptonshire chamber of commerce, training and enterprise which have now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standards we set.

GCSE Results

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will provide the GCSE average point score (A*=7) per 15-year-old pupil of each secondary comprehensive school in England by local education authority in each year from 1991 to 1995 as calculated by her Department, together with the number of such pupils per school in each year and the percentages of those pupils achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A to C, at least five GCSEs at Grades A to G, at least one GCSE at grades A to C and at least one GCSE at Grades A to G; [18887]

(2) if she will provide figures for the average number of GCSE subjects entered per pupil, to three decimal places, in each year since 1991 for each individual 20th group of all 15-year-old pupils ranked according to their average point scores (A*=7), for the cumulative 20th groups, indicating the numbers of each group and of the whole cohort in each case, in respect of *(a)* all such pupils in England, *(b)* all such pupils in the local education authority maintained sector, excluding those of grant-maintained schools, *(c)* all such pupils in the grant-maintained sector, *(d)* all such pupils in the maintained sector excluding those from independent schools and *(e)* all such pupils from the independent sector. [18891]

Mrs. Gillan: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of the answer in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans the Office for Standards in Education has to introduce a method of assessing the comparative effectiveness of secondary comprehensive schools in terms of their pupils' GCSE achievements in relation to their capabilities, as measured by statistically estimated GCSE scores derived from social characteristics, in all its inspections from April 1996; to what extent these will apply the method and characteristics set out in Ofsted's report of July 1995 "Assessing Schools' GCSE Performance"; and if she will make a statement; [18888]

(2) if she will list *(a)* Ofsted's comparative school effectiveness indicators alongside the name of each school and its local education authority for each of the secondary comprehensive schools included in the analysis of its report "Assessing Schools' GCSE Performance" of July 1995, *(b)* Ofsted's expected three-year average of the annual GCSE point score (A*=7) for each of these schools for 1992 to 1994, *(c)* each school's actual three-year average of its point scores in the same period and *(d)* such information for the period 1993 to 1995 as is available; [18889]

(3) if she will make a statement on the Ofsted report of July 1995 entitled, "Assessing Schools' GCSE Performance", in respect of the findings of its research on the indicators of the comparative effectiveness of all English secondary comprehensive schools in terms of the standards of GCSE achievements in relation of Ofsted's statistically estimated assessments of pupils' capabilities. [18890]

Mr. Robin Squire: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

HEALTH

After-school Clubs

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he proposes for vetting staff in after-school clubs and play schemes after their deregulation. [18039]

Mr. Bowis: We are currently considering this.

Childless Couples

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which health authorities provide NHS treatment for *(a)* assisted and *(b)* surrogate pregnancy for childless couples; and if he will make a statement; [17965]

(2) what plans he has to designate *(a)* assisted and *(b)* surrogate pregnancies for childless couples on the NHS as clinically essential; and if he will make a statement. [17964]

Mr. Horam: Information on which health authorities provide national health service treatment for assisted and surrogate pregnancies is not available centrally.

The Department of Health does not designate which services are clinically essential. This is a matter for clinicians. Decisions about the availability of infertility services are for clinicians and individual health authorities to determine, as they are in the best position to decide priorities in the light of local needs and circumstances.

GP Fundholders

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what rights community health councils have to make representations on the medical care decisions taken by general practitioners involved in total fundholding; [17958]

(2) what obligations are placed on general practitioners involved in total fundholding to consult with representatives of patients to identify community needs for medical care. [17957]

Mr. Malone: Total purchasing pilot projects operate under devolved purchasing arrangements from health authorities. In the same way as health authorities, they are required to consult community health councils about significant service changes. Similarly, in accordance with the priorities and planning guidance for the NHS and the accountability framework for general practitioner fundholding, total purchasing projects are expected to involve patients in the planning and development of services. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Tameside Acute Care Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the cost of severance payments made by Tameside Acute Care trust to achieve its proposed reduction in the number of managers; [17933]

(2) if he will publish a complete schedule of the severance costs of health authorities and trusts incurred to meet the management reduction targets for 1996–97. [17944]

Mr. Malone: These are local matters and this information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Maggie Aikman

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to recover a proportion of the severance payment made to Mrs. Maggie Aikman by the Burnley Health Care trust following her appointment as finance director to Gwent health authority. [18036]

Mr. Malone: I am taking no such action.

Population Statistics

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current Office of Population Censuses and Surveys estimate of the population of England and Wales. [18330]

Mr. Horam: The mid-1994 estimate of the resident population for England and Wales is 51,620,500. This is the latest available.

Vacant General Practitioner Posts

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received criticising the Medical Practices Committee's power to decide whether vacant general practitioner posts should be abolished or advertised. [18348]

Mr. Malone: None.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions in each of the last five years the Medical Practices Committee has decided to disperse the patient list of a vacant general practitioner post following a recommendation by a health authority that the post be advertised. [18457]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Medical Practices Committee

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the preparation of the day-to-day casework of the Medical Practices Committee is done manually. [18437]

Mr. Malone: The preparation of day-to-day casework of the Medical Practices Committee is a matter for the chairman and members of the Medical Practices Committee.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made as to whether it is appropriate that the Medical Practices Committee may disperse a patient list regardless of a family health services authority recommendation to the contrary. [18331]

Mr. Malone: Decisions on whether patient lists should be advertised or dispersed are made by the Medical Practices Committee in pursuit of its statutory function to maintain an even distribution of general medical practitioners throughout England and Wales. The committee should take the views of health authorities into account.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the overall computerisation of the Medical Practices Committee has taken place. [18473]

Mr. Malone: The committee's secretariat has access to the Department's computerised office information system. Further computerisation will be subject to the committee submitting a full business case.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to his Department of financing the Medical Practices Committee in each of the last five years. [18332]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Year	*Budget* £
1991–92	408,000
1992–93	358,000
1993–94	357,000
1994–95	394,000
1995–96	383,000

The budgets for 1991–92 and 1994–95 included money for one-off requirements.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health within what time scale a health authority must present its recommendations to the Medical Practices Committee when a general practitioner post falls vacant. [18349]

Mr. Malone: Regulation 11(5) of the General Medical Services Regulations 1992, as amended, requires family health services authorities to consult with the local medical committee before submitting any recommendation to the Medical Practices Committee on the need to fill vacant posts. No formal time scale is laid down.

HIV (Anti-viral Medicines)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of *(a)* the Delta trial in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the protease inhibitor trials in the USA; and what steps he is taking to ensure that patients with HIV have ready access to combination therapies of dual or triple anti-viral medicines. [18489]

Mr. Horam: Preliminary results from the recent Delta trial on combination therapy were very encouraging for patients who have not taken AZT previously and publication of the full results is expected this summer. The American trials on protease inhibitors are showing promising results. The Government have made substantial sums of money available for HIV and AIDS services. Where different drug regimes are available, it is a matter for individual clinicians to discuss with patients and decide on the best form of treatment.

NHS Trust Chairpersons (Crown Cars)

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has recently changed the guidelines relating to the issue of crown cars to chairpersons of NHS trusts. [18345]

Mr. Malone: There have not been any recent changes to the guidelines on the issue of crown cars to chairmen of national health service trusts. The crown car scheme relates only to those staff employed by NHS bodies and there are no comparable provisions for chairmen and non-executive directors of NHS trusts.

NHS Trusts (Administration Costs)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in rank order the amount spent on administration in each NHS trust in England. [18288]

Mr. Malone: The information is not available centrally.

Section 64 Grants

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many successful applications for section 64 grant aid funding for 1996–97 went to *(a)* non-London organisations and *(b)* new applicants. [18340]

Mr. Bowis: Ministers are currently in the process of considering applications for grants under the section 64 general scheme in 1996–97. Individual organisations will be notified of the outcome as soon as consideration of their application is complete.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public and private beds there *(a)* were in 1985, *(b)* were in 1990 and *(c)* are currently in the Leeds general infirmary, St. James hospital and in the Leeds Healthcare region as a whole. [18343]

Mr. Horam: The information available centrally is shown in the tables. Organisational changes that have taken place over the 10-year period mean that data are not directly comparable.

Average daily number of NHS beds, wards open night and day

	United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	*St. James's University Hospital NHS Trust*	*Leeds District Health Authority*
1985	1,232	1,379	5,717
1990–91	1,223	1,369	4,478
1994–95	1,492	1,117	4,078

Source: DH SH3 returns (1985); KHO3 returns (1990-91 and 1994-95).

Amenity Beds (private beds)

	United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	*St. James's University Hospital NHS Trust*	*Leeds District Health Authority*
1985	11	0	16
1990–91	n/a	n/a	4
1994–95	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: DH SH3 returns (1985); KHO2 returns (1990–91).

Information on numbers of amenity beds ceased to be collected centrally from 1 April 1991 when the power of authorisation for private beds was delegated to health authorities and trusts.

Patient Numbers

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are registered by the family health services authorities in England and Wales. [18367]

Mr. Malone: The available data are contained in the general medical services statistics for England and Wales (April 1995), copies of which are available in the Library.

Legal Costs

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on the collection of legal costs he is awarded by the courts following an individual's litigation against him and his Department. [18478]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has no specific policy on enforcement of costs orders. Each case is decided on the basis of the costs incurred and the difficulty and cost of enforcement. Where a case is struck out at an early stage, the costs involved are minimum and although an order for costs may be sought, the costs of enforcement are rarely justified.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what occasions the chief medical officer has discussed the control of MRSA with Houghs Healthcare. [18826]

Mr. Horam: The chief medical officer has had no discussions with Houghs Healthcare. He is aware of the leaflet about MRSA which Houghs Healthcare has sent to all Members of Parliament and considers it inaccurate.

Dorset Community Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ascertain and publish the reasons for the resignation of Ms Vanessa White, the chief executive of Dorset community trust, and the amount of severance payments made to her. [18827]

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the trust.

Prodigy Project

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the medicines listed in the Prodigy project are *(a)* generic and *(b)* brand-named; and how this balance was reached. [18736]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on 19 December 1995, columns *1154-55*.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on the establishment of a national formulary for prescribing, and if he intends the Prodigy project to be a pilot for a formulary. [18727]

Mr. Malone: There are no plans to establish a national prescribing formulary. General practitioners including those using the Prodigy system, are free to prescribe the drugs of their choice.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the aim of the Prodigy project. [18734]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on 18 December 1995, columns *946*.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list how the money allocated by his Department to the Prodigy project is being spent; and what sums are being contributed by the participating IT software companies. [18770]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield on 18 December 1995, column *946*. Information relating to expenditure by the participating information technology software companies is commercially confidential.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the IT software companies participating in the Prodigy project. [18733]

Mr. Malone: AAH Meditel; EMIS; Genisyst; Medical Care Systems (in conjunction with Digitalis of the Netherlands) and VAMP.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the numbers and types of general practices participating in the Prodigy project, *(b)* their locations by region or district and *(c)* their fundholding status; and if he will make a statement on how the practices were chosen. [18769]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield on 18 December 1995, column *945*.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations, and from whom, he has so far received on the Prodigy project. [18735]

Mr. Malone: Representations have been made by a number of bodies including patient organisations, pharmaceutical companies and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. In addition, views have been expressed by professional medical bodies, including the General Medical Services Council and the Royal College of General Practitioners as part of the consultation process.

Live Births

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many live births were registered in England and Wales during 1995. [18860]

Mr. Horam: The provisional count of the number of live births registered in England and Wales during 1995 is 646,511.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for in-patient treatment at the end of each of the last five years. [18828]

Mr. Horam: The information available is contained in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England at 31 March 1991–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

Lindane

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on links between lindane usage and population cancer clusters. [18728]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health's independent expert advisory Committee on the Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment reviewed the available epidemiological data on breast cancer in women and levels of lindane in serum and breast fat tissue at its meeting on the 16 March 1995. The committee concluded that there was no clear evidence of an association between serum and levels of lindane in fat and breast cancer at the present time, and recommended that the matter be kept under review. No research has been specifically commissioned by the Department.

Neurological Services, Sussex

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last assessed plans for neurological services in Sussex; and if he will make a statement. [18660]

Mr. Horam: The provision of neurological services in Sussex is a matter for the health authorities concerned, which are currently considering options for the development of neurosciences and neurosurgery services. Their decision may require to be referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Residential Care

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assumptions he has made in his calculation of the cost to local authorities of implementing the changes to capital asset levels for long-term care of *(a)* the cost of local authority residential care (i) in London and (ii) outside London, *(b)* the cost of private and voluntary residential care (i) in London and (ii) outside London, *(c)* the cost of nursing home care (i) in London and (ii) outside London, *(d)* the average client contribution to each type of residential care, *(e)* the number of current residents who will be affected by the proposed changes in capital asset levels, *(f)* the number of self-funders who will now become eligible for assistance in (i) nursing homes and (ii) residential homes and the consequent additional costs to local authorities and *(g)* the number of new entrants to residential care who will receive local authority support in 1996–97. [18963]

Mr. Bowis: A range of factors and assumptions was used in calculating this cost, including consideration of a survey conducted by the local authority associations.

Emergency Care Services

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make an announcement on the future of emergency care services. [19552]

Mr. Dorrell: Tomorrow.

Capital Limits (Residential Accommodation)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the final allocation in 1996–97 to social services authorities in England in respect of costs incurred as a result of the raising from 8 April of the capital limits for charges for residential accommodation. [19553]

Mr. Dorrell: Following consultation with the local authority associations about the implications of the changes to the capital limits, the Government have decided, subject to parliamentary approval of the 1996–97 main estimates, to make available £64.487 million for English social services authorities in 1996–97. The increase compared with the element for England underlying the figures published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report, 1996–97", will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure for 1996–97. Subject to parliamentary approval, this provision will be made available to local authorities through a special grant in 1996–97; thereafter these resources will be taken into account in the calculation of the revenue support grant in the normal way. Consequential provisions will be made for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Capital Disregard Rules (Residential and Nursing Homes)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he plans to announce the distribution formula for additional funding to local authorities as a consequence of the changes in capital disregard rules for assessment for residential and nursing homes; [18974]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total reductions of income to local authorities as a result of changes to capital disregard rules for assessment for residential and nursing homes; [18975]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) today.

Capita Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those private finance initiative schemes in which the Capita Group is *(a)* expressing an interest and *(b)* bidding. [19178]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally. It is for individual national health services trusts and health authorities to determine the private sector companies that they negotiate with when preparing a private finance initiative scheme.

GP Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the annual average cost of prescriptions per patient prescribed by *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholding general practitioners for each year since the introduction of fundholding for which the figures are available for (i) England, (ii) each regional health authority and (iii) each family health service authority. [14967]

Mr. Malone *[pursuant to his reply, 13 February 1996, c. 562]:* I regret that there was an error in the information provided. The correct information available is shown in the table.

Prescribing costs (£ NIC/PU)—England

	GP fundholders	*Non GP fundholders*
1991–92	36.92	38.84
1992–93	41.40	43.64
1993–94	45.88	48.20
1994–95	50.24	52.28
1995–96 (to Q2)	52.16	54.48

1. NIC/PU=net ingredient cost per prescribing unit.
2. NIC is essentially the cost of prescriptions before allowing for pharmacists' discounts and container costs.
3. PUs are a weighting used to adjust for the higher cost of drugs for older people. Each person counts as 1 PU for under 65-year-olds, 3 PUs for 65-years-olds and older.
4. The two groups (Fundholding GPs/Non-Fundholding GPs) are not exclusive—during the period some non fundholders will have become fundholding and vice versa.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Football Hooligans

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were listed on the National Criminal Intelligence Service's database of suspected football hooligans at the end of each season since 1990–91; and how many are currently listed; [17851]

(2) how many foreign nationals from each of the countries participating in the Euro '96 championship are listed on the National Criminal Intelligence Service's database of suspected football hooligans. [17852]

Mr. Maclean: The National Criminal Intelligence Service football unit's computer system does not retain information about the number of people listed on the database on a season-by-season basis. The names of 6,010 suspected or known football hooligans are on the system at present. The database does not hold information concerning foreign nationals.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to ensure that foreign nationals convicted of football-related offences in their home country are prevented from attending the Euro '96 championships. [17850]

Mr. Maclean: The police are working closely with the Immigration Service to ensure that foreign nationals convicted of football-related offences coming to the United Kingdom for Euro '96 are identified on arrival and, if appropriate, refused entry.

The majority of those attending the championships will be nationals of the European Economic Area, EEA—which comprises the 15 member states of the European Union, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein—who can be refused entry to the United Kingdom where information on their past conduct, which can include previous convictions, suggests that they pose a genuine and serious threat to public safety. Non-EEA nationals can be refused entry to the United Kingdom under the relevant provisions of the immigration rules.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Premier league and Football league clubs together with the number of people arrested and subsequently given an exclusion order under the Public Order Act 1986 for each season since 1990–91. [17849]

Mr. Maclean: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The total number of exclusion orders made since part IV of the Public Order Act 1986 came into force on 1 August 1987, is 6,303; 308 orders are currently extant.

Private Security Industry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make available to hon. Members the review of the case for statutory regulation of the private security industry. [17950]

Mr. Maclean: Our review is a continuing exercise to examine the case for regulation of the private security industry. The Home Affairs Committee report has made a valuable contribution to our considerations and the Government's response will reflect our conclusions.

Foundation for Business Responsibilities

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Charity Commission investigated payments to Efficiency in Local Government Ltd. from the Foundation for Business Responsibilities as part of its inquiries into the foundation. [18095]

Mr. Sackville: The Charity Commission has not carried out any such investigation.

Mr. Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of state for the Home Department on what dates the Charity Commission's second inquiry into the payments by the Foundation for Business Responsibilities to Marketforce Communications *(a)* began and *(b)* ended; when the Charity Commission received the list of donors to the foundation; if he will make a statement on the Charity Commission's access to the research projects and leaflets which were produced by Marketforce Communications on behalf of the Foundation for Business Responsibilities; and if he will make a statement on the activities of the Foundation for Business Responsibilities since 1992. [18201]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* The Charity Commission's second inquiry began on 18 November 1993 and ended on 31 March 1995. It is regretted that the answer given to the hon. Member on 13 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *697–98*, mistakenly referred to this as a period of four and a half months. A list of donors to the foundation was received by the commission on 23 December 1991. The commission has a copy of one leaflet produced by Marketforce Communications Ltd., which was provided in connection with the first inquiry. It is understood that, since 1992, the foundation has been involved in the sponsorship of and participation in research and educational activities covering subjects such as health issues of employees, insider trading, business ethics and responsible global marketing.

Drugs (Searches)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of people stopped and searched for possible drugs in the Metropolitan police area during 1995. [18263]

Mr. Maclean: Statistics on stops and searches for 1995 are not yet available.

Fire Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages of setting up a national committee of inquiry into the structure, funding and organisation of the fire services. [18289]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such intention at present. The Fire Service has recently been subject to a major value-for-money study by the Audit Commission. The resulting report made important recommendations which are being pursued by the organisations concerned through the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council and elsewhere.

National Joint Unit

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to integrate the national joint unit with *(a)* the National Criminal Intelligence Service and *(b)* the proposed national crime squad for England and Wales. [18335]

Mr. Maclean: There are no plans to integrate the national joint unit with the National Criminal Intelligence Service or a national crime squad.

Metropolitan Police (Ethnic Minority Officers)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of ethnic minority police officers in the Metropolitan police area; and what ranks such officers hold in respect of *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [18295]

Mr. Maclean: The information below, obtained from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, is correct as at 29 February.

Ethnic minority officers in the Metropolitan police

Rank	*Male*	*Female*
Superintendent	1	0
Chief Inspector	4	0
Inspector	9	1
Sergeant	45	4
Constable	556	177
Totals	615	182

Prisons (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of drug finds in each of the prisons in the Greater Manchester area in each of the last 12 months. [18257]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 5 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of drug finds in prisons in the Greater Manchester area in each of the last 12 months.

The attached table shows the number of drug finds in Her Majesty's Prisons Hindley and Manchester for the period 1 February 1995 to 31 January 1996.

Reported drugs finds 1 February 1995 to 31 January 1996
HMP Hindley and HMP Manchester

	Hindley	*Manchester*	*Month totals*
February			
Barbiturate	1	—	
Cannabis	9	4	
Heroin	—	1	15
March			
Cannabis	10	5	
Heroin	—	1	16
April			
Cannabis	7	2	
Cocaine	—	1	
Heroin	—	1	11
May			
Cannabis	3	4	
Cannabis Plant	—	1	
Heroin	1	—	9
June			
Amphetamine	—	1	
Cannabis	8	3	
Heroin	—	1	13
July			
Cannabis	6	12	
Heroin	—	2	
Other	—	1	21
August			
Amphetamine	—	2	
Cannabis	8	8	
Cocaine	1	—	
LSD	—	1	
Other	1	1	22
September			
Cannabis	9	3	
Cocaine	—	2	
Heroin	—	2	16
October			
Amphetamine	—	1	
Cannabis	8	3	
Heroin	—	1	13
November			
Cannabis	13	4	
Other	—	2	19
December			
Barbiturate	1	—	
Cannabis	13	9	23
January			
Cannabis	7	5	
Cocaine	—	1	
Heroin	—	1	
Other	2	—	16
Total	108	86	194

John Porter Charitable Trust

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations into the John Porter Charitable Trust have been carried out by the Charity Commission since 1990; what prompted these investigations; and what were their conclusions. [18203]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* An inquiry by the Charity Commission into the John Porter Charitable Trust was conducted between August 1992 and March 1993 and prompted by the commission's own programme of monitoring charity accounts. It did not reveal any material issues which required further investigation.

Fire Service College

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the proposals for dealing with the Fire Service College and its existing debt; and if he will make a statement on the future plans for maintaining the service training provision. [18731]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *517*.

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the Government's response to the report on the options necessary for the continuation of the Fire Service College. [19108]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *512*.

Jury Service

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the restrictions on persons excusable from jury service as of right *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in other EU countries. [18767]

Mr. Maclean: The entitlement to be excused from jury service as of right is restricted to Members of Parliament, the forces, and medical and other similar professions. It has long been accepted that these groups should have a right to be excused on the ground of their special and personal duties to the state, or because of their special and personal responsibilities for the immediate relief of pain or suffering. The royal commission on criminal justice considered the arrangements for selection of jurors but made no recommendation to change the restrictions. We have no present plans to assess the practice in other European Union countries.

Pat Molloy (Dental Records)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral statement of 28 February, *Official Report*, column 841, if he will make an oral statement on the dental records of Pat Molloy. [18957]

Mr. Kirkhope: No. The relevant information has been disclosed to the solicitors acting for the late Mr. Molloy's estate.

Prisoners' Brains

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have had their brains removed for medical research in the last year for which figures are available. [18909]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 5 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question on the number of prisoners who have had their brains removed for medical research in the last year for which figures are available.

When an inmate dies in the custody of the Prison Service the disposal of the body becomes a matter for the coroner and the next of kin. Prison Service staff would not be involved in soliciting body parts either for organ donation or medical research whatever the wishes of the inmate might have been.

Stalking

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to make stalking a criminal offence; and if he will make a statement. [16380]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) on 6 February, *Official Report*, column *111*.

Disabled Prisoners

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the guidelines issued to prison governors on what provision should be made for prisoners who are physically disabled. [18321]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 5 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking if he will place in the Library of the House the guidelines to prison governors on what provision should be made for prisoners who are physically disabled.

Relevant guidance is contained in Prison Standing Orders 1A 46–47 and 7F 6–7 and 15, copies of which are held in the Library of the House. In addition, all prison governors received in March 1995 a copy of research report "The Deaf in Prison" by a former prison officer which was a helpful exposition of the problems and needs of deaf prisoners. Copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Arrangements for the management of prisoners with physical disabilities are currently under review in consultation with organisations representing those with hearing, sight and other physical disabilities. We expect to issue revised guidance during 1996–97.

Peter Clowes

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons no decision was made by his Department in relation to the application for parole by Peter Clowes by the time of the deadline on 20 February. [18323]

Miss Widdecombe: Mr Clowes's case, like many other parole applications, had to be given full and careful consideration on its merits. Every effort was made to complete the various stages of the process by 20 February, but the need for additional information and advice in the final stages meant that a decision could not be reached until two days later.

Young Offenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners aged 15 and 16 years were being held in young offenders institutions and remand centres in England and Wales on the most recent date for which information is available; and if he will list the establishments concerned and the numbers held in each *(a)* on remand and *(b)* following sentence; [18373]

(2) how many young people aged 15 and 16 years were being held in establishments other than young offender institutions on the most recent date for which information is available; and if he will list the establishments concerned and the numbers held in each *(a)* on remand and *(b)* following sentence; [18374]

(3) how many young people aged 15 and 16 years were being held in private prison establishments institutions on the most recent date for which information is available; and if he will list the establishments concerned and the numbers held in each *(a)* on remand and *(b)* following sentence. [18375]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alun Michael, dated 5 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General of the Prison Service, to reply to your recent Questions asking, how many persons aged 15 and 16 years were being held in young offenders' institutions and remand centres, private prisons and those held in establishments other than young offender institutions in England and Wales on the latest available date; in which establishments they were held; and if they were held on remand or under sentence.

The latest information is for 31 January 1996 and is given in the attached table.

Population of 15 and 16-year-olds in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 31 January 1996[1]

	15-year-olds			*16-year-olds*		
	Remand	*Sentence*	*Total*	*Remand*	*Sentence*	*Total*
Remand centres						
Brinsford	—	—	—	2	—	2
Exeter	—	—	—	1	—	1
Feltham	—	—	—	3	—	3
Glen Parva	4	—	4	19	—	19
Gloucester	—	—	—	3	—	3
Hindley	5	—	5	21	3	24
Low Newton	7	—	7	10	—	10
Northallerton	1	—	1	15	—	15
Norwich	1	—	1	—	—	—
Swansea	1	—	1	6	5	11
Total remand centres (male)	19	—	19	80	8	88
Closed YOIs (male)						
Aylesbury	—	1	1	—	3	3
Brinsford	—	1	1	—	2	2
Castington	—	—	—	—	1	1
Deerbolt	—	—	—	—	2	2
Feltham	—	4	4	—	13	13
Glen Parva	—	3	3	—	12	12
Moorland	—	1	1	—	8	8
Onley	—	—	—	—	1	1
Portland	—	—	—	—	1	1
Stoke Heath	—	—	—	—	5	5
Swinfen Hal	—	—	—	—	4	4
Total closed YOIs (male)	—	10	10	—	52	52
Juvenile YOIs (male)						
Brinsford	16	7	23	17	7	24
Deerbolt	1	14	15	—	39	39
Feltham	10	22	32	35	35	70
Huntercombe	—	2	2	—	21	21
Lancaster Fms	2	—	2	3	1	4
Onley	—	14	14	—	34	34
Portland	1	10	11	—	48	48
Stoke Heath	—	11	11	—	38	38
Thorn Cross	—	6	6	—	8	8
Werrington	—	18	18	—	41	41
Wetherby	—	10	10	—	28	28
Total juvenile YOIs (male)	30	114	144	55	300	355
OTHER ESTABLISHMENTS						
Local prisons (male)						
Cardiff	2	—	2	3	—	3
Doncaster[2]	4	1	5	14	—	14
Exeter	—	—	—	1	—	1
Hull	2	—	2	3	—	3
Total local prisons (male)	8	1	9	21	—	21
Closed YOIs (female)						
Bullwood Hall	—	—	—	—	1	1
New Hall	—	2	2	—	2	2
Styal	—	2	2	—	1	1
Total closed YOIs (female)	—	4	4	—	4	4
Open YOIs (female)						
Drake Hall	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Sutton Park	—	—	—	—	1	1
Total open YOIs (female)	—	—	—	—	1	1
OTHER ESTABLISHMENTS						
Local prisons (female)						
Holloway	—	—	—	—	1	1
Pucklechurch	—	—	—	—	1	1
Total local prisons (female)	—	—	—	—	2	2
Total all establishments	57	129	186	156	367	523

[1] Provisions figures.

[2] Private prisons.

Remand Prisoners (Drug Offences)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were being held in prisons in England and Wales *(a)* on remand regarding alleged drugs offices and *(b)* following sentence for trafficking in drugs on the last date for which information is available. [18377]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who as been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alun Michael, dated 5 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many people were being held in prisons in England and Wales *(a)* on remand regarding alleged drugs offences and *(b)* following sentence for trafficking in drugs on the last date for which information is available.

On 31 January 1996 there were 1,150 remand persons held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for drug offences.

An analysis of the sentenced prison population by principal drugs offence on 30 June 1994 is given in the Table 1(d) of Prison Statistics England and Wales 1994 (Cm 3087) a copy of which is available from the library. On that date 800 persons were held for unlawful supply, 1,100 for possession with intent to supply unlawfully and 1,200 for unlawful import/export.

Prisoner Repatriations

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received a response from the Republic of Ireland concerning the application by seven prisoners detained in the United Kingdom to be repatriated to prisons in the Republic; when he intends to reach a decision in each case; when he expects the prisoners to be repatriated; and if he will make a statement. [18899]

Miss Widdecombe: The Council of Europe convention of the transfer of sentenced persons came into force for the Republic of Ireland on 1 November 1995. The first seven requests made by prisoners in England and Wales seeking repatriation to the Republic were referred to the Irish authorities on 21 December. A response on five of these requests was received on 14 February; an response in respect of the two remaining requests is awaited.

All repatriation requests require careful consideration and repatriation is subject to both jurisdictions and the prisoner concerned consenting to the arrangements for the continued enforcement of the sentence concerned. Decisions will be made on the individual merits of each request and notified to the prisoner concerned as soon as is possible.

Children's Certificates (Public Houses)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many public houses have been issued with children's certificates. [18634]

Mr. Kirkhope: The latest available statistics are that, as at 30 June 1995, 1,669 children's certificates had been granted in respect of licensed premises in England and Wales. Statistics on the type of licensed premises concerned are not collected, but most are likely to be public houses.

Prevention of Terrorism Legislation

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of people held for *(a)* 48 hours or under and *(b)* over 48 hours under the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism legislation for each year since 1975. [19069]

Mr. Howard: The number is set out in the table.

In Great Britain

	Under 48 hours	*Over 48 hours*
1974 (from 29 November)	13	46
1975	930	137
1976	1,006	60
1977	824	29
1978	599	23
1979	617	240
1980	411	126
1981	216	58
1982	183	37
1983	146	45
1984	163	40
1985	172	94
1986	145	57
1987	174	51
1988	161	25
1989	145	36
1990	158	35
1991	123	30
1992	143	17
1993	113	39
1994	57	4
1995	16	18

Figures for Northern Ireland prior to 1989 are not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Figures from 1989 to 1994, the last full-year figures are available, are as follows:

In Northern Ireland

	Under 48 hours	*Over 48 hours*
1989	1,119	1,580
1990	1,140	1,550
1991	1,186	1,681
1992	1,384	1,795
1993	1,252	1,638
1994	1,168	1,511

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of people in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* England and Wales and *(c)* Scotland for each year since 1974 who have been (i) questioned, (ii) charged, (iii) prosecuted and (iv) convicted under the prevention of terrorism legislation. [19068]

Mr. Howard: From 29 November 1974 until 22 March 1984, 141 people were charged with offences under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1974 and 1976 following detention under those Acts. Fifteen cases were not proceeded with, 21 were acquitted and 105 were found guilty.

From 22 March 1984 until 31 December 1995, 94 people had been charged with offences under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1984 and 1989. Seventy-one were found guilty, four were acquitted and 19 cases were not proceeded with.

There are no figures available for the total number of people questioned under Prevention of Terrorism legislation.

Figures are not kept separately for England and Wales and for Scotland, and a year-by-year breakdown of charges could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Figures for Northern Ireland are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the administration and future of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989; and if he will make a statement. [19070]

Mr. Howard: Since the Act was last renewed, one letter has been forwarded by a Member of Parliament.

In his report on the operation of the Act in 1995, the reviewer, Mr. J. J. Rowe QC, has recommended that the Act be renewed in its entirety. This view is support by the police.

Lord Lloyd has invited public comments on his inquiry into the continued need for counter-terrorism legislation and is receiving a considerable response.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applicants are accompanied by a child or children. [19115]

Mr. Kirkhope: In 1995, 43,965 principal applicants applied for asylum in the United Kingdom. Of these, approximately 5,400—12 per cent.—were accompanied by dependants. The estimated total number of dependants was 11,000 of which approximately half were minor children.

The figures quoted include dependants accompanying or subsequently joining the principal applicant prior to an initial decision on the application being made.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the weekly cost to the public funds of maintaining an asylum seeker in *(a)* a detention centre *(b)* a prison. [19113]

Mr. Kirkhope: For financial purposes, no distinction is made between people who have applied for asylum and others detained under Immigration Act powers. The average cost of detaining a person in a centre in the immigration service detention estate is currently estimated at £540 per week. This figure includes the cost of administrative support from headquarters.

The majority of asylum applicants detained in Prison Service accommodation will normally be housed separately in specially designated establishment, where the average cost per place in 1994–95 was £449 per week. This figure excludes headquarters costs.

The large majority of those who are detained who have claimed asylum at some stage have already had their applications rejected.

Zinc-lined Coffins

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the specification of zinc-lined coffins for the disinterment and re-interment of those hanged and buried on HM prison premises became standard practice; and if he will review it. [19154]

Mr. Sackville: A requirement for zinc-lined coffins has been specified, on health grounds, in licences for the removal of human remains in certain circumstances for very many years. The requirement would be reassessed in any case where we could be satisfied that the precaution was not needed.

Key Performance Indicators (Prisons)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent the costs of support from the parent company are contained in the cost per in-use certified normal accommodation place in accordance with published key performance indicators for privately run gaols. [18939]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 5 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking to what extent the costs of support from the parent company are contained in the cost per in-use certified normal accommodation place in accordance with published key performance indicators for privately run gaols.

The figures used to report cost per place at privately managed prisons are based on payments made to the contractor for operating the prison. Payments are made on the basis of a contract agreed as a result of the competitive process. It is a matter for the contractor to what extent any parent company costs are borne on the contract price.

Fire Authorities' Budget

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the average budget for Metropolitan fire brigades and *(b)* the budget for the west midlands fire and civil defence authority in 1996–97. [19050]

Mr. Sackville: The information for 1996–97 is not yet held centrally. For 1995–96 the position is as follows:

	£million
London	254.12
Greater Manchester	74.34
Merseyside	49.54
South Yorkshire	32.93
Tyne and Wear	36.18
West Midlands	71.85
West Yorkshire	55.08
Average	82.01

West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the pension deficit of *(a)* the west midlands fire service and *(b)* the west midlands civil defence authority for each of the last five years; and if he will give the estimated figures for 1996 and 2000. [19054]

Mr. Sackville: Net payments under the firefighters' pension scheme by west midlands fire and civil defence authority are given for the latest year for which central figures are available. The figures do not differentiate between fire and civil defence.

1989–90: £4.3 million 1990–91: £4.5 million 1991–92: £4.8 million 1992–93: £5.9 million 1993–94: £6.2 million

No estimates of actual expenditure have been made by my right hon. and learned Friend in respect of the west midlands brigade for future years.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the efficiency of the community fire safety initiatives implemented by the west midlands fire and civil defence authority; [19049]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* preventable fire deaths and *(b)* preventable child fire deaths in the west midlands fire and civil defence authority in each of the last five years. [19051]

Mr. Sackville: The west midlands fire service is to be commended for the priority which it has given to the work of its community relations department since 1991.

While it is difficult to establish a causal link between fire safety publicity and reductions in casualties, the fact that fire deaths are at their lowest level nationally for 30 years points to the effectiveness of fire safety campaigns and fire prevention work carried out by fire brigades.

Information on deaths is not available in the form requested. The available information is contained in table 60 of the Home Office publication "Fire Statistics—United Kingdom 1993", and previous years, which is available in the Library.

Theft (Walworth Town Hall)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many officials of Southwark council, the relevant trade unions, and the contract cleaning companies have been interviewed by the Metropolitan police in respect of the theft of street sweeping documents from Walworth town hall; [19060]

(2) if reference has been made to the Crown Prosecution Service in respect of theft of street sweeping documents from Walworth town hall; and if he will make a statement; [19062]

(3) to which Metropolitan police station the theft of documents relating to Southwark street sweeping contracts from Walworth town hall was reported; and on what date. [19061]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that this theft was reported at Walworth police station in September 1995 and that, following an interview with a sentenced offender, the commissioner regards the offence as cleared up. The Crown Prosecution Service has not been involved.

Newbury Bypass (Arrests)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made at the site of the proposed Newbury bypass; and how many people have *(a)* been charged, *(b)* appeared in court and *(c)* been convicted. [19071]

Mr. Maclean: As at 1 March 1996, there had been 345 arrests at the site of the Newbury bypass and, by 29 February, 287 people had been charged. To date, four people have appeared in court, receiving conditional discharges, and 13 have been cautioned by the police.

Exclusion Orders

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of persons *(a)* who are currently subject to exclusion orders under the prevention of terrorism legislation and *(b)* from whom exclusion orders have been removed since 1983. [19047]

Mr. Howard: There are currently 33 exclusion orders made under the of terrorism Act; 29 relate to people who have been excluded from Great Britain and four to people from the United Kingdom.

On 31 December 1982, there were 248 exclusion orders in force for which the Home Secretary was responsible. Information on the cumulative number of orders made, lapsed or revoked since that time is not readily available and could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

In Northern Ireland, 33 exclusion orders have been removed since 1983.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have *(a)* been detained, *(b)* been charged, *(c)* been convicted, *(d)* been acquitted and *(e)* become subject to exclusion or had exclusion orders withdrawn under powers provided by the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 since August 1994; and if he will make a statement. [19048]

Mr. Howard: In Great Britain, 53 people have been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act PTA—since August 1994. Thirteen were subsequently charged with an offence. Of these, eight have been convicted and two acquitted; the remaining three are currently awaiting trial. A further six detainees were released under the PTA then redetained under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. They have all since been released on police bail. None of those charged was charged with an offence under the PTA. One of those detained was later made the subject of an exclusion order.

In Northern Ireland, there were 682 detentions under the PTA from 1 September 1994 to 31 December 1995. One hundred and seventy-two were subsequently charged with an offence, but figures on convictions and acquittals are not readily available. None of the detainees was subsequently made the subject of an exclusion order.

Offender Tags (Sweden)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the progress of the Swedish Government's trials of the offender tag system; and if he will make a statement. [17255]

Mr. Sackville: We have kept in touch with the Swedish Government about the trials, and noted that a substantial number of offenders have been electronically monitored, although within a different sentencing framework. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State plans to visit Sweden shortly.

WALES

Job Vacancies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many job vacancies there are in the jobcentres at *(a)* Shotton and *(b)* Flint. [17377]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The numbers of unfilled vacancies notified to jobcentres in the Shotton and Flint jobcentre areas were 286 and 82 respectively at 5 January 1996, based on Central Statistical Office figures.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many foreign companies have applied to his Office or the Welsh Development Agency for grants during the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [17739]

Mr. Hague: Since March 1991, 224 foreign-owned companies have applied for regional selective assistance.

University of Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many students attended the university of Wales in the sessions *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1984–85 and *(c)* 1994–95; and if he will make a statement; [17560]

(2) what was the total of Welsh students who attended the university of Wales in the sessions *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1984–85 and *(c)* 1995–95; and if he will make a statement. [17561]

Mr. Richards: The information requested us as follows:

	1974–75[1]	*1984–85*[2]	*1994–95*[3]
Welsh domiciled students[4]	5,642	5,380	15,053
All students	16,681	20,486	41,522

[1] At March.
[2] At December.
[3] At December. Provisional.
[4] Information on domicile is only available for full-time students in 1974–75 and 1984–85, but they represent over 90 per cent. of the enrolment.

Banking, Insurance and Finance Sector

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list his Department's latest estimates of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time females in employment in banking, insurance and finance in (i) 1995, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1990 within the areas covered by the valleys initiative; and what percentage change in each category level occurred in 1995 against (1) 1992 and (2) 1990. [17564]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on Friday 1 March, *Official Report,* columns *785–86.*

Student Funding

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students received funding from Mid Glamorgan county council for courses outside the county in *(a)* 1974–75, *(b)* 1984–85 and *(c)* 1994–95; and if he will make a statement. [17527]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Wales Tourist Board

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the names of members of the Wales tourist board, the area of home residence of each member, the date of first appointment to the board, and the date on which the current appointment expires in each instance. [17887]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows:

Name	*Area*	*First appointment made*	*Current appointment expires*
Mr. A. R. Lewis	Mid Glamorgan	1 October 1992	30 September 1998
Mrs. G. T. Bevan	South Glamorgan	13 October 1992	12 October 1998
Mr. C. R. Jackson OBE	Clwyd	19 December 1990	18 December 1996
Mr. T. O. S. Lloyd	Dyfed	2 June 1995	1 June 1998
Mr. J. G. McAllister	Clwyd	5 May 1995	4 May 1998

Welsh National Opera

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will arrange to meet officials of the Welsh national opera company to discuss the implication for the future of their work in Wales of the rejection by the Millennium Commission of his proposal for a national opera house for Wales. [17879]

Mr. Hague: I have no plans to meet officials of Welsh national opera. The WNO is funded by the arts councils and any discussions should be held with them.

General Practitioners

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many doctors there are currently employed by the national health service as general practitioners in Wales; how many vacancies there are at present waiting to be filled; and if he will make a statement. [17880]

Mr. Hague: At 1 April 1995, the latest date for which data is available, there were 1,833 general medical practitioners in Wales of whom 1,710 were unrestricted principals. Information on the number of vacancies is not collected centrally.

Homeworkers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest available estimate of the number of homeworkers in Wales; how many of these are regarded as self-employed; and how many as employers. [17881]

Mr. Hague: Information on homeworkers is available from the labour force survey. Estimates for spring 1995 indicate that there were 30,000 people in Wales who worked from their own homes. Some 19,000 of these were self-employed. No reliable estimate for Wales is available of the number of homeworkers who were employers.

Inward Investment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with Invest in Britain ways in which the recent decline of inward investment in Wales can be reversed. [17883]

Mr. Hague: The absolute number of inward investment projects recorded for Wales with the Invest in Britain Bureau has, at between 60 and 70 per annum, remained relatively constant for a number of years. Our percentage share of the Great Britain total was lower in 1994–95 than in previous years, but the competition has become more intense and, at 11 per cent, it was more than double Wales' percentage share of the Great Britain population. The Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency, local authorities and other bodies such as the Development Board for Rural Wales and Cardiff Bay development corporation, are working together to achieve further successes. The recent announcements by Halla of Korea; STS of Japan; and Newport WaferFab of Hong Kong show that these efforts are bearing fruit.

New Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many projects for the establishment of new manufacturing industry have been financially assisted by his Department during *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* the present financial year; and how many of these were located in (i) Gwynedd and (ii) Dyfed. [17888]

Mr. Hague: The number of new manufacturing projects coming forward where my Department was able to make an offer of financial assistance under the regional selective assistance scheme was as follows:

	1994–95	*[1]1995–96*
Wales	56	45
Gwynedd	2	2
Dyfed	5	1

[1]1995–96 to end February.

Transport Grant

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons there is a lower limit of £5 million on transport grant projects in Wales; and what estimate he has made of the number of schemes to strengthen road bridges in Wales to meet the new European Union requirements that fall into a category of less than £5 million. [18296]

Mr. Hague: The £5 million transport grant threshold has been agreed with the local authority associations in Wales. They are of the view that smaller schemes are properly for the discretion of local authorities and should be funded from unhypothecated resources. Local authorities are responsible for identifying the bridges which need strengthening on non-trunk roads.

Cardiff Royal Infirmary

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation he has had with the chairman of the University of Wales Healthcare NHS trust concerning the transfer of elderly patients from the Cardiff royal infirmary to the University hospital of Wales on the night of 28 to 29 February; and what reasons were given for the transfer. [19149]

Mr. Hague: Although I have not spoken to the chairman of the trust about this matter, I understand that all patients transferred agreed to the move given that beds were needed at the Cardiff royal infirmary for patients requiring emergency treatment. The trust has apologised to the patients involved and will make every effort to avoid a repetition.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the resignation of John Jasper from the chairmanship of Capita Managed Services and its effects on the bidding by the management buy-out group for the EstateCare Group of the authority; [19148]

(2) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the suspension of the bidding process for the EstateCare branch of the authority and the suitability of the Capita Group as a partner of the management buy-out team in that bidding process. [19147]

Mr. Hague: None. The privatisation of the EstateCare Group is proceeding as planned. The two remaining bids by the management buy-out/Capita plc and Pell Frischman Group are currently being evaluated and this process will take account of their financial standing.

European Structural Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Welsh local authorities in the European Union objective 2 and 5 regions concerning the setting up of an independent secretariat for the monitoring and assessment of European structural fund applications. [19179]

Mr. Hague: The proposal for a free-standing executive to manage European structural fund work was included in documentation tabled by the authorities and discussed at my meeting with representatives of the counties and districts in November 1995. Following my announcement to the House on 29 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns 1024–40, I shall be issuing a consultation document as a basis for further discussions on this subject with the local authorities and the wider partnership.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those private finance initiative schemes in respect of which the Capita Group has *(a)* expressed an interest and *(b)* submitted a bid in (i) the health sector and (ii) other sectors. [19176]

Mr. Hague: Information of this nature is treated as commercially confidential.

European Social Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the European Commissioner responsible for the European social fund concerning the administration of the social fund in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [19180]

Mr. Hague: I announced on 29 February, *Official Report*, columns 1024–40, that responsibility for management of the European social fund in Wales would transfer from the Department for Education and Employment to the Welsh Office in January 1997. My Department will be considering with the European Commission and with the partnership detailed arrangements for this work after that date, including the possibility of delegation to the free-standing executive body it is proposed should be established to manage structural fund programmes. I discussed the matter with Commission officials during my visit to Brussels yesterday.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 6 March 1996

TRANSPORT

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many speed restrictions have been imposed for a period greater than six weeks since 1 April 1994 on the west coast main line. [17153]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack informs me that there are currently 50 speed restrictions in place on the west coast main line. Details of past restrictions are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

RAF Northolt

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress his Department has made in developing new proposals to extend and improve the services offered at RAF Northolt for business users. [18456]

Mr. Norris: Following the decision in April 1995 not to proceed with a separate civil enclave at RAF Northolt, and the further consultation with business users and operators, my Department and the Ministry of Defence have been actively assessing what improvements might be implemented.

Royal Train

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *145*, what was the operating cost of the royal train per mile travelled including overheads, maintenance and security when a member of the Royal Family was on board or when the train was being positioned. [17932]

Mr. Watts: Rail Express Systems Ltd. has supplied information that the cost of the royal train in 1994–95 including overheads, maintenance and British Transport police security, when a member of the royal family was on board or when the train was being positioned, was £136.30 per mile. This consisted of £21.30 per mile operating costs and £115 per mile for overheads, maintenance and security. Corresponding information for the calendar year 1995 is not yet available.

M66

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates his Department has made of future traffic flows for the M66 between Denton and Middleton in both directions. [18254]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 6 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about future traffic flows on the M66 Manchester Outer Ring Road.

The traffic levels do vary along the length of the motorway, so I have set out below the flows for the sections between the junctions. These forecasts are based on 16 hour daily flows.

M66 motorway section	*Opening year*		*Design year*	
	Low growth	*High growth*	*Low growth*	*High growth*
A57 to A635	81,000	90,000	94,000	113,000
A635 to A62	73,000	82,000	85,000	101,000
A62 to A663	38,000	42,000	44,000	53,000
A663 to A664	43,000	48,000	50,000	60,000
A664 to A576	57,000	64,000	67,000	81,000
A576 to M62	70,000	77,000	83,000	100,000

Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what sites other than existing airports his Department has in the south-east for airport development. [18452]

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport does not itself hold any sites for airport development in the south-east, or elsewhere in the country.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the development of *(a)* the Lydd and *(b)* the Manston sites as additional airport capacity in the south-east. [18446]

Mr. Norris: Following identification by the Civil Aviation Authority as potential sites for development in air traffic control terms, Lydd and Manston were two of the sites considered by the working group on runway capacity to serve the south-east. RUCATSE concluded that neither Lydd nor Manston would be suitable as sites for providing additional runaway capacity to serve the south-east and should not be subject to detailed assessment.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional work his Department has undertaken in relation to potential development of Heathrow and Gatwick airports following the publication of the RUCATSE report. [18453]

Mr. Norris: The Government's response to the RUCATSE report, announced on 2 February 1995, said that the Secretary of State was asking the CAA, in conjunction with the British Airports Authority and others, to carry out further work to examine the gains that might be achieved and the environmental impact involved in making better use of existing runway infrastructure at Heathrow. He also invited BAA to investigate the possibility of less environmentally damaging options for runway development, such as a close parallel runway at Gatwick. In addition, I chair the steering group for the London airports surface access study, which is examining the opportunities for improvements in access to and between London's main airports by rail and through traffic management measures.

Ferry Inspections (Dover)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names of ferries inspected in the port of Dover in the last 12 months, indicating the defects found aboard each vessel. [18675]

Mr. Norris: In my answer to the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 27 April 1995, *Official Report*, columns *614-15*, I stated the Government's belief that there is no benefit to the travelling public to be gained from the release of the results of routine inspections. The technical content of the report would not be easily comprehensible and could be open to misinterpretation.

In cases where an inspection of a foreign-registered roll-on roll-off ferry reveals serious deficiencies which lead to its detention, the details would be included in the list of ships detained in the UK ports, which is published monthly by the Marine Safety Agency.

Airport Security

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each major UK airport for each of the last five years the number of security inspections undertaken by his Department. [18677]

Mr. Norris: The six major airports in the UK were subject to the following number of security inspections in each of the last four years:

Airport	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*Total*
Heathrow	89	124	136	115	464
Gatwick	46	80	83	105	314
Manchester	18	31	24	32	105
Glasgow	14	27	35	25	101
Birmingham	18	11	16	22	67
Stanstead	12	22	18	14	66
Total	197	295	312	313	1,117

The information is not available for 1991–92.

Inspectors visited these airports on many other occasions, mainly to audit and test their operations and to inspect, audit and test the operations of the airlines using them.

Salvage Agreements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what circumstances and under what powers *(a)* his Department and *(b)* port authorities may override a salvage agreement. [18602]

Mr. Norris: Under section 137 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, the Secretary of State may give directions to the owner, master or any salvor in possession of a ship requiring any of them to take, or refrain from taking, any action for the purpose of preventing or reducing oil pollution. The power may be exercised where an accident has occurred to or on a ship, and in the opinion of the Secretary of State, oil from the ship will or may cause pollution on a large scale in the United Kingdom or in United Kingdom waters, and in his opinion the use of the powers is urgently needed.

Under the Dangerous Vessels Act 1985, a harbour master may give directions prohibiting the entry into, or requiring the removal from, the harbour of any vessel if in his opinion the condition of that vessel, or the nature and condition of anything it contains, is such that its presence in the harbour might involve a grave and imminent danger to the safety of any person or property or that it might seriously prejudice the use of the harbour by other vessels. Directions may be given to the owner, master or any salvor in possession. Under section 3 of the Act the Secretary of State may give directions on those lines to the harbour master, in effect overriding any directions the harbour master has given. The Dangerous Vessels Act does not affect the exercise by the Secretary of State of his powers under section 137 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995.

Harbour authorities generally also have statutory powers to remove a vessel which is sunk, stranded or abandoned, so as to avoid interference with navigation. Some authorities may also have powers to direct a master or other persons having control of a vessel with the object of preventing or reducing pollution.

Air Accident, Dominican Republic

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what dates the aircraft involved in the accident off the Dominican Republic on 7 February flew into the United Kingdom. [18672]

Mr. Norris: At the time of the crash the Boeing 757 aircraft involved was being operated by the Dominican airline Alas Nacionales on lease from the Turkish carrier Birgenair. Neither airline has operated services to the United Kingdom.

Between May 1992 and April 1993 the aircraft was one of eight of its type operated by the Canadian carrier Nationair. During that period Nationair operated many charter services to the United Kingdom. Our records do not show whether or not this aircraft was used on any given flight.

Agency Chief Executives

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the annual salary for the chief executive of each of his Departments' agencies for each year of their operation. [18671]

Mr. Norris: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 4 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *119–21*.

The following changes have taken place subsequently to some of the chief executives salaries:

Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency

1 August 1995: £55,802

Vehicle Certification Agency

1 August 1995: £48,193

Driving Standards Agency

1 August 1995: £59,044

The Coastguard Agency

1 August 1995: £52,230

Marine Safety Agency

1 August 1995: £47,427

Airport, Redhill

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the possibility of the creation of a feeder or reliever airport at Redhill. [18673]

Mr. Norris: None. On 5 April 1995, the Secretary of State for the Environment refused planning permission for an application for development of Redhill as a feeder-reliever to Gatwick.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much *(a)* has been and *(b)* remains to be paid to the unsuccessful consortia which bid for the channel tunnel rail link contract. [19096]

Mr. Watts: The Government announced in March 1994 that they would be prepared to contribute to the costs of unsuccessful bidders in the channel tunnel rail link competition. That contribution would be £1.5 million or 33 per cent. of costs properly incurred in the preparation of bids submitted in March 1995, whichever was the less. Claims have been settled from the two consortia which were not shortlisted—Union Link and Green Arrow. The Government also indicated in 1994 that an additional contribution might be available in respect of costs incurred after tenders had been submitted. An offer of £1 million or 33 per cent. of costs, whichever was the lower, was subsequently made in respect of the period after shortlisting in July 1995. A claim has not yet been received from Eurorail CTRL Ltd. The decision to reimburse a portion of the bidders' costs reflected their large investment in preparing bids and the benefits derived by maintaining competitive pressure throughout the process. The amounts involved are small in the context of the size of the CTRL project.

Aircraft (Iceballs)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of iceballs from aircraft hitting houses occurred in the last five years; and how many injuries were caused by such incidents. [19085]

Mr. Norris: There have been 51 incidents of icefall from aircraft hitting houses over the last five years. One incident resulted in bruising when ice hit a roof showering the injured party with debris.

Late Trains

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much compensation has been paid by operating companies of the former British Rail to passengers in respect of late running trains. [19245]

Mr. Watts: Under British Rail's passengers charter, compensation is paid in respect of late running and cancelled trains. Between April 1994 and February 1996, British Rail's train operating companies have paid £7.9 million to passengers in the form of season ticket discounts and ex-gratia compensation.

Highways Agency Information Line

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many calls have been made to the Highways Agency information line in each month since September 1995 on the subject of *(a)* cones and *(b)* other matters; and what was the average cost to the agency for each call in each category. [19275]

Mr. Watts: The number of calls that have been received in the Highways Agency information line since September 1995 are as follows. The Highways Agency's records distinguish between *(a)* complaints covering a range of issues on roadworks and *(b)* general inquiries about roadworks.

	Complaints	*Inquiries*	*Totals*
October	485	650	1,135
November	331	746	1,077
December	158	356	514
January	166	65	231
February	105	406	511
	1,245	2,223	3,468

The Highways Agency does not keep a separate record of costs by category. The average cost to the agency for each call is about £2.50.

Trans-European Network

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now support the designation of the Penzance-Bristol mainline railway as a high-speed trans-European network route at the Council of Ministers. [18624]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The Department has relied on advice from British Rail and Railtrack on the categorisation of TENs rail routes in the UK. The TENs maps are not a wish list; they must reflect current realities or investment priorities. The Bristol-Penzance line does not meet the criteria for designation as high-speed and Railtrack has no current plans to upgrade it. It is therefore rightly categorised as a conventional rail link. The feasibility studies for which we are now seeking TENs funding will examine the options for improving journey times on both the Penzance-Bristol and Reading-Taunton routes and form a basis for investment decisions in the future. This is a positive step towards securing the improved rail infrastructure that the west country is seeking.

Marine Accidents

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he first received a copy of the marine accident investigation branch report into the grounding of the Borga; and what action he has taken to date to implement its recommendations; [18893]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *583*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the marine accident investigation branch report into the grounding the Borga; [18902]

(3) what amendments he has made to the report of the marine accident investigation branch on the grounding of the Borga originally delivered to him. [18894]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* The report of the Marine Accident Investigation Branch into the grounding of the Borga has not yet been sent to Ministers. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library when it is published. The content of the report is entirely a matter for the MAIB, which is independent of Ministers; Ministers have no part in the drafting of the report.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on which dates a heavy duty salvage tug was *(a)* present and *(b)* absent from the vicinity of Milford Haven during the last three months; and if he will make a statement. [17985]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Cynog Dafis, dated 6 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Question about tugs.

A heavy duty salvage tug was in the vicinity of Milford Haven on the following dates:

14–15 December 1995

25 December 1995

24 January 1996

16–29 February 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Cement Kilns

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to require that the maximum permissible concentration of heavy metals in secondary liquid fuel burnt in cement kilns shall be no more than the maximum permitted concentration in coal burnt in cement kilns. [18867]

Mr. Clappison: There are no limits set for heavy metals in coal. Limits on the heavy metals in the secondary liquid fuels are set on the basis of trial results and the requirement to meet emission limits.

Secondary Liquid Fuels

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which waste regulation authorities in England have classified secondary liquid fuel as waste; what plans the Environment Agency has to apply the duty of care provisions of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to secondary liquid fuels *(a)* in the area covered by each such authority and *(b)* in other areas of England. [18873]

Mr. Clappison: Whether or not a substance is waste must be determined on the facts of the case and the interpretation of the law is a matter for the courts. The Department has provided guidance on the interpretation of the definition of waste in DOE circular 11/94. No central record is held of waste regulation authorities' view on the definition of waste in relation to particular substances.

The duty of care is an essentially self-regulatory system and the Environment Agency will not have a specific duty to enforce it. The effect of regulation 4 of the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991 will be to require a person on whom the Environment Agency serves a notice to provide a copy of the written description of the waste and the transfer note which those involved in the transfer of waste are required by regulation 3 to keep.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the cases where Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has used its powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to revoke an authorisation granted under part I of that Act or under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, together with the reasons for each such revocation. [18865]

Mr. Clappison: A total of 96 cases have been revoked. However, of these 93 have been at the instigation of the operator. The three cases revoked at Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's instigation are listed as follows:

Company	*Date issued*	*Reason for revocation*
A W Stokes and Sons (Drums) Ltd., West Bromwich	28 November 1994	Failed to effect improvement conditions in authorisation
Beacon Waste (Hanley Swan Incinerator), Hanley Castle, Worcester	10 February 1995	Failed to meet authorisation conditions. Company appealed successfully against revocation
Birds Commercial Metals Ltd., Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire	1 March 1996	Plant not built, therefore never operated

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Greater Manchester Waste Regulation and Disposal Authority in regard to membership of his regional enviornment protection advisory committee; what reply he is sending; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement. [18947]

Mr. Clappison: The Greater Manchester Waste Regulation and Disposal Authority has nominated a councillor for membership of the Environment Agency's north-west regional environment protection advisory committee. The Secretary of State will shorly be taking a decision on the membership schemes proposed for the REPACs by the agency, but decisions on individual members are a matter for the agency itself.

Air Quality

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities chosen to implement phase one of the air quality duties under part IV of the Environment Act 1995. [19202]

Mr. Clappison: The 14 areas chosen for first phase implementation comprise the following authorities:

The London boroughs and the City Corporation

Cambridge county council, Cambridge city and South Cambridgeshire district councils

Hampshire county council, city councils of Portsmouth, Southampton and Winchester; borough councils of Basingstoke and Deane, Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport, Havant, Rushmoor and Test Valley; district councils of East Hampshire, Hart, New Forest and the Isle of Wight unitary authority

Cornwall county council, district councils of Caradon, Carrick, Kerrier, North Cornwall and Penwith and Restormel borough council

Bristol city council, Bath and North East Somerset unitary authority—currently Bath city council and Wansdyke district council—South Gloucestershire unitary authority—currently Northavon district council and Kingswood borough council; North West Somerset unitary authority—currently Woodspring district council

City councils of Birmingham and Coventry; metropolitan borough councils of Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton

District councils of Bolsover, Derbyshire Dales and North East Derbyshire; borough councils of Chesterfield and High Peak

Ribble Valley borough council

Liverpool city council and the metropolitan borough councils of Knowsley, Sefton, St. Helens and Wirral

Metropolitan borough councils of Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham

Newcastle upon Tyne city council and the metropolitan borough councils of Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland

Glasgow city council

Aberdeen city council

Swansea and Neath and Port Talbot unitary authorities

Sustainable Development

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the outcome of the UK round table meeting on sustainable development on 22 February; and if he will make a statement. [19808]

Mr. Gummer: The UK round table met on 22 February, having published in January three initial reports—on freight transport, the domestic energy market, 1998 and beyond, and environmental management and audit. At the 22 February meeting, the round table agreed its first year annual report, which will be published shortly and to which the Government will respond formally. The meeting also discussed the Sea Empress oil spill, progress in the OECD ministerial environment committee and issues arising from the Newbury bypass.

Emergency Night Shelters

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of *(a)* the current number of people in emergency night shelters in London, *(b)* the impact on that number of the implementation of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations and *(c)* the current number of unoccupied places in the shelters. [19114]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* Information is not held centrally about the numbers of people and of unoccupied places in emergency night shelters in London. The impact on the number of people using night shelters of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996 will depend on future inflows of people from abroad, the number of those people who choose to seek asylum, when they choose to do so, the lengths of time they choose to stay in this country, and the accommodation options open to them.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what performance targets have been set for the Ordnance Survey executive agency in the year 1996–97. [19341]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following performance targets have been set for Ordnance Survey in 1996–97:

1. To recover at least 83 per cent. of the costs incurred by the agency.
2. To ensure that by 31 March 1997, 96 per cent. of existing major details is surveyed and available to customers in the national topographic database at any one time. The target will increase to 99 per cent. by the year 2000.
3. In order to provide a quality service to customers, to despatch products in response to orders as follows:

   95 per cent. of all Land-Line digital map units within six working days;

   90 per cent. of small-scale maps within five working days.

To increase by 5 per cent. the annual revenue earned per member of staff employed.

These targets, some of which are being incrementally increased, are closely associated with the key corporate aims of Ordnance Survey and demonstrate the agency's continuing commitment to customers and to improved value for money for all its stakeholders.

PRIME MINISTER

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the content of all briefings given by his press office on the subject of the Scott report since 15 February. [19283]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

This would be neither customary nor practicable.

Hong Kong (Visit)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out his programme during his recent visit to Hong Kong. [19214]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

It is not my right hon. Friend's normal practice to do so.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister if all his engagements during his recent visit to Hong Kong related to public duty. [19215]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

Yes.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister (1) on how many occasions car based and mobile phones allocated to the use of his office have been cloned; to which officers these phones had been allocated; and when this cloning was discovered, in each of the last five years; [18949]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *45*, to which officer in his personal office the phone cloned in 1994 was allocated; when it became apparent that this phone had been cloned; and what action has been taken by his office to improve the security of the mobile phone in the use of his office; [18950]

(3) on how many occasions mobile phones allocated for the use of *(a)* himself and *(b)* his office have been cloned since his appointment. [18951]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend on 22 January, *Official Report*, column *45*. I have nothing further to add.

Arms Exports

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister which Departments hold information relative to the financing by British banks, since 1980, using their customers' balances, of arms supplied to Iraq and Iran; which British banks were involved; what proportion of such financing went on the supply of Valmara 69 anti-personnel land mines; and if he will make a statement. [17934]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

Exports of lethal equipment including anti-personnel land mines from the United Kingdom to Iraq or Iran would require an export licence. No such licences have been issued since 1980. The financing by British banks of arms sales from other countries to Iraq and Iran would be a matter for Government Departments only if breaches of United Nations' sanctions were involved. Government Departments hold no evidence of such breaches by British banks. If the right hon. Member has any information regarding possible breaches of United Kingdom export controls or United Nations' sanctions, he should pass it to the relevant authorities.

Public Appointments (Women)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Prime Minister how many appointees to public offices in the list of public appointments were women for each year since 1990; and what proportion these represented of the total for each office. [18249]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

Information about the annual number of women appointed to public office is not maintained centrally. However, it is known that in 1990 and 1991, women held 23 per cent. of the total number of appointments to public bodies. In October 1991, at the launch of Opportunity 2000, my right hon. Friend announced a Government initiative aimed at increasing this figure further. Good progress has been made and the percentage of such posts held by women, at 1 September 1995, is 30 per cent. The following table gives the figures for the intervening years:

	Total number of public appointments	*Held by women*	
		Number	*Per cent.*
1990	44,057	10,256	23
1991	39,122	9,135	23
1992	41,011	10,701	26
1993	42,606	12,007	28
1994	42,876	12,686	30
1995	40,170	11,898	30

European Courts

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages to the United Kingdom of membership of *(a)* the European Court of Justice and *(b)* the European Court of Human Rights; and by what mechanism the United Kingdom can withdraw from membership of each. [17766]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

Accepting jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice is an essential element of European Union membership, the advantages and disadvantages of which have been discussed many times in this House. The UK could withdraw from the jurisdiction of the ECJ only by withdrawing from the EU.

Our policy in respect of the European convention on human rights was set out by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 13 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *647*.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Stott: To ask the Prime Minister if his negotiations with the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland to determine the electoral process will include the Progressive Unionist party and the Ulster Democratic party. [18943]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* I have been asked to reply.

Letters of invitation to the round of intensive consultations with the parties were sent on 28 February and the leaders of the Progressive Unionist party and the Ulster Democratic party were among the recipients.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Employment (Irish Nationals)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of persons resident in the Irish Republic who work in Northern Ireland, broken down by gender; how many of each sex are employed in each sector of the economy; and how many are employed in each council area. [18224]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is not available.

Watercourse Management

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for the future organisation of the watercourse management division of the Department of Agriculture. [19739]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Having recently completed the prior options study which was announced to Parliament on 20 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *341–42*, the Government have decided that the watercourse management division should become a next steps agency from 1 October 1996.

The division is responsible for the provision of flood defence and river drainage systems and for promoting the sustainable development of inland navigation and water recreation facilities.

Making the watercourse management division a next steps agency will give it the flexibility to operate within a framework of appropriate efficiency targets and performance indicators, while remaining a part of the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland.

Inward Investment

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many inward investment projects have settled in Northern Ireland as a result of guidance given by the Invest in Britain Bureau over the past three years; and if he will make a statement. [17732]

Mr. Ancram: I am not aware of any inward investment projects having settled in Northern Ireland over the past three years as a result of guidance given by the Invest in Britain Bureau.

School Teachers

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will request the Irish Republic's Minister for Education to extend to secondary school teachers her concession on Northern Ireland trained primary school teachers without an Irish language qualification; and if he will seek legal advice on whether the Scrudu Cailiochta sa Ghaeilge requirement breaches European employment law. [18521]

Mr. Ancram: These are matters for the Irish Government.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what legal advice he has taken on the compliance of a decision to end the exemption in the Fair Employment Act permitted for the appointment of school teachers with article 2 of the first protocol to the European convention on human rights. [18522]

Mr. Ancram: No legal advice has been taken regarding this issue.

Census Questions

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make representations to the Home Secretary to include a question about Ulster origin in the pilot census on a question on Irish origin. [18523]

Sir John Wheeler: As part of the Great Britain small-scale census question testing programme, it has been decided to test various changes to the ethnic origin question, including incorporating a separate Irish category. To date, no case has been made by users to classify people from Ulster separately and therefore this is currently not being considered.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration is being given to *(a)* including an ethnic origin question and *(b)* re-wording the religious affiliation question in the Northern Ireland census; and if he will make a statement. [18524]

Sir John Wheeler: It is planned that an ethnic origin questions will be tested in the 1997 census in Northern Ireland. The wording of all census questions, including a religious affiliation question, will be subject to review before final decisions are made. The finalised census question will be laid before Parliament by way of a Northern Ireland Order in Council, before the census.

Orders in Council (Debate)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those Orders in Council requiring an affirmative resolution of the House that have been debated in a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation to date; from what date the current procedures in respect of *(a)* Orders in Council and *(b)* consideration in Standing Committees commenced; and which orders he intends to be debated in a Standing Committee in the current Session of Parliament. [18525]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Act 1974 enables the Government to legislate for Northern Ireland by way of Order in Council. In December 1994, the House agreed that all affirmative statutory instruments would be referred automatically to a Standing Committee, but could be de-referred on a Government motion, with the Government acceding to any reasonable Opposition request for de-referral. This was initially on an experimental basis but was incorporated into Standing Orders at the start of the current Session.

Since then, the following Northern Ireland Orders in Council have been debated in Standing Committee—prior information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost;

Orders in council under the Northern Ireland act 1974 debated in Standing Committee

	Date of debate in Standing Committee
Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order	16 February 1995
Fair Employment (Amendment) (NI) Order	22 February 1995
Children's Evidence (NI) Order	28 February 1995
Wildlife (Amendment) (NI) Order	28 February 1995
Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order	9 May 1995
Arts Council (NI) Order	7 June 1995
Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (NI) Order 1995	8 June 1995
Trade Union and Labour Relations (NI) Order 1995	4 July 1995
Road Traffic (NI) Order 1995	17 October 1995
Police (Amendment) (NI) Order 1995	18 October 1995
Financial Provisions (NI) Order	1 November 1995
Street Works (NI) Order 1995	28 November 1995

Orders in council under the Northern Ireland act 1974 debated in Standing Committee

	Date of debate in Standing Committee
County Courts (Amendment) NI Order	29 November 1995
Education (NI) Order	7 December 1995
Gas (NI) Order	17 January 1996
Business Tenancies (NI) Order	7 February 1996
Juries (NI) Order	28 February 1996

The question of whether a forthcoming Order in Council should be debated in Standing Committee will be settled when it arises.

Rathgael Centre

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many residents of the Rathgael centre in Bangor left without permission in each month of 1995; and how many were *(a)* charged and *(b)* cautioned with offences committed while out of bounds. [18526]

Sir John Wheeler: Rathgael is an "open" training school and the information requested about those absent without leave is as follows:

1995	*Care*[1]	*Offenders*	*Total*
January	19	16	35
February	20	16	36
March	29	22	51
April	24	12	36
May	19	15	34
June	29	16	45
July	25	24	49
August	25	15	40
September	12	14	26
October	23	21	44
November	23	19	42
December	19	24	43

[1] Residents requiring care, protection or control are accommodated separately from those given a training school order following a finding of guilt of a criminal offence.

A total of 70 children who absconded from Rathgael in 1995 were charged with offences. Of these, 15 were there for care reasons and 55 for offending.

A total of nine children who absconded from Rathgael in 1995 received a caution. Of these, eight were there for care reasons and one for offending.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Access to Work

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of those who applied for access to work before 18 December, but have not yet had their applications processed, will have their applications considered under the criteria used when they applied. [11485]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 6 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about how people who applied for Access to Work before 18 December will have their applications considered.

The Secretary of State's announcement said that we would meet existing commitments. Thus everyone who made an application for Access to Work before 18 December will have had their applications considered under the criteria used when they applied.

I hope this is helpful.

EDS Ltd.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those contracts her Department currently holds with EDS, indicating for each the *(a)* date of inception, *(b)* value and *(c)* duration. [17447]

Mr. Robin Squire: I have been unable to identify any contracts between the Department and the company EDS.

Further Education (Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what change there has been in enrolments on further education courses in the Greater Manchester area from 1987 to 1995. [18260]

Mr. Paice: Enrolments on full-time further education courses in Greater Manchester rose from 29,700 in 1986–87 to 44,100 in 1994–95, an increase of 48 per cent. Part-time enrolments fell by 22 per cent., from 104,100 to 81,100. The number of full-time equivalent students rose by 20 per cent. from 49,000 to 58,500.

Nursery Education Provision

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what will be the level of provision per pupil under the Government's proposed nursery scheme for *(a)* year 1, *(b)* year 2 and *(c)* year 3, for those pupils (i) aged three-and-a-half-years, (ii) in reception class and (iii) aged four years; and how this figure compares with the current provision. [18799]

Mr. Robin Squire: Local education authority budgets will be reduced only by the voucher value for every four-year-old in maintained provision. They will receive £1,100 for every full voucher redeemed at a local authority-maintained school. If LEA-maintained schools recruit the same number of four-year-olds as now, then their budgets will be unaffected. Moreover, if they currently spend above the voucher value on places for four-year-olds, or on provision for three-year-olds, the funding mechanism ensures that they retain the funds to continue doing so. They will, therefore, continue to be able to fund pre-school places at existing levels.

The expansion of provision will be largely driven by parental choice and is expected to become universal for four-year-olds within a reasonable time.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many local education authorities will suffer financial penalties under the provision of the nursery voucher scheme. [18797]

Mr. Robin Squire: No local education authority will lose any funding if it continues to recruit the same number of four-year-olds as it does now. Moreover, the voucher scheme will leave LEAs with funds to make grants to the voluntary sector, and for other related purposes.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from the Manchester Diocesan Board for Education in regard to her proposals for nursery vouchers; what reply she is making; and if she will make a statement. [17212]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received one letter from the Manchester diocesan board of education, dated 21 February, about the nursery voucher scheme. My right hon. Friend will shortly send a full reply.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and employment if the calculation of the number of weekly guided learning hours using the criteria set out in the Further Education Funding Council's document "How to Apply for Funding 1996–97," para 164 by a claimant of jobseeker's allowance will be accepted by the Employment Service; and if she will make a statement. [19044]

Mr. Forth: Yes, it will.

Access to Work

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects the review of access to work to be completed; and if she will make a statement. [19146]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 6 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the review of Access to Work.

Further to my earlier reply to you on this subject printed in Hansard, 24 January, column 285, the review of Access to Work is nearly complete, following discussions with organisations principally concerned about the programme's operation.

I hope this is helpful.

Equal Opportunities

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her Department's implementation of the European Union's third medium-term equal opportunities programme for men and women. [17269]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government supported the third Community action programme on equal opportunities for men and women, which ran from 1991 to 1995. The programme had three broad objectives: the implementation and development of legislation; integration of women in the labour market; and improving the status of women in society. The Government have taken a wide range of actions in all these areas.

Grant-maintained Schools (Funding)

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made about the projected savings to the Funding Agency for Schools in respect of the introduction of private sector funding for grant-maintained schools' capital expenditure. [18836]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The contribution of private sector funding to capital expenditure on grant-maintained schools will depend upon the decisions of individual school governors and the private sector. We have made it clear that capital grant from the Funding Agency for Schools will continue to ensure that essential work is funded at GM schools.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cable and Wireless

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what use the Government have made of their golden share in Cable and Wireless in respect of the appointment of foreign nationals. [17154]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government accepted a request in December from Cable and Wireless to change article 119 of that company's articles of association to facilitate the appointment of a new chief executive. Article 119 relates to the managing and executive directors—paragraph B specifically to the nationality of senior executives—and the Government's agreement as special shareholder is required to amendments to this article. I announced the Government's agreement in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), on 18 December 1995, *Official Report*, column 862.

Argentina (Arms Sales)

Mr. Cann: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new guidelines were placed on arms sales to Argentina between May 1979 and March 1982; and when and what were the nature of the guidelines. [18091]

Mr. Lang: There were no special guidelines on arms sales to Argentina in the period specified. Export licence applications for the sale of defence equipment to Argentina were circulated to the MOD and the FCO, and were considered on the basis of consistency with our strategic, security and foreign policy interests.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what *(a)* arms and *(b)* arms-related contracts with the Argentine Government were approved by Her Majesty's Government between the years 1979 and 1982. [19352]

Mr. Lang: No substantial contracts for defence equipment were signed and completed after 1978. Some contracts signed before 1979 were fulfilled in 1979–81, and some contracts or spares for existing UK equipment were fulfilled.

Jordan (Exports)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will now provide information on compliance

by Jordan with end user certificates covering goods exported between 1985 to 1993, referred to in his answer of 5 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *106*. [18540]

Mr. Lang: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend on 5 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *106*.

Telecommunications (Key Escrow)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce a key escrow into Britain's telecommunications industry. [18482]

Mr. Ian Taylor: While there are no specific plans to introduce key-escrow services into our telecommunications system, discussions are taking place between Government Departments on the provision of encryption services on these networks. Such discussions will seek to balance the legitimate commercial needs of the business community, for secure and confidential communications, with those of the law enforcement authorities. Key retrieval services therefore, via a network of trusted third parties, are one of the issues being considered.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what degree of independence the Medical Research Council has in determining the subjects of its research projects. [19173]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The responsibilities and powers of the Medical Research Council are as defined in the Science and Technology Act 1965 and its supplemental royal charter, dated 16 December 1993.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the statutory role of his Department or agencies of his Department in deciding the subjects of research projects conducted by the Medical Research Council. [19174]

Mr. Taylor: My statutory role in relation to the Medical Research Council is as set out in the Science and Technology Act 1965, as amended by the Transfer of Functions (Science) Order 1992 and the Transfer of Functions (Science) Order 1995.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received alleging erosion of independence of the Medical Research Council by his Department or agencies of his Department. [19175]

Mr. Taylor: None.

Launch Aid

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been awarded in launch aid in each year since 1990; and how much has been repaid in each year. [19093]

Mr. Eggar: Following is a table showing the amount of launch aid awarded and repaid since 1990.

£ million

Financial year	*payments*	*Receipts*
1990–91	141.1	51.8
1991–92	78.7	83.0
1992–93	31.4	74.7
1993–94	0.6	56.9
1994–95	2.0	47.0

Launch aid financial information is collated within the Department in financial rather than calendar years.

Rolls-Royce (Tupolev Aircraft)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance he has given to Rolls-Royce to secure contracts for the supply of Rolls-Royce engines for Tupolev aircraft. [19095]

Mr. Eggar: The Export Credits Guarantee Department has invited the Russian Ministry of Finance to nominate Rolls-Royce RB211 aeroengines for the Tupolev 204 as a priority for ECGD cover if it wishes to do so. However, the order or priorities is for the Russian authorities to decide.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Government published their strategy for the aerospace industry. [19092]

Mr. Eggar: The Government work with the Society of British Aerospace Companies, which published its national aerospace framework in January. The SBAC and DTI set out the areas on which they are working together in a joint statement, which I announced on 29 November 1995.

British Coal Enterprise

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had about the future of British Coal Enterprise; and if he will make a statement. [18946]

Mr. Page: My ministerial colleagues and I have discussions about British Coal Enterprise as necessary. Officials in my Department remain in close touch with British Coal about the future of BCE.

Nigeria (Arms Sales)

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the types of export licences granted for the sales of arms products to Nigeria since November 1993. [17281]

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Science and Technology on 10 May 1995, *Official Report*, columns *517–18* and the answer my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry gave to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) on 27 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *459*. On 11 November 1995, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a full UK arms embargo against Nigeria and, subsequently, on 20 November the European Union introduced a full scope arms embargo against the country.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will write to the hon. Member when the statistical analysis of export licences granted for military, para-military and security equipment during 1995 has been placed in the Library of the House.

Arms Manufacturers

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the number of companies who are manufacturing arms under licence in the United Kingdom for a foreign parent company. [17282]

Mr. Lang: No such estimate has been made.

Radio and Television Interference

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes will occur in respect of the Radiocommunications Agency's charge for investigating interference to domestic television and radio reception. [19809]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The agency's charge to visit householders to diagnose their reception arrangements will be increased from £35 to £40 with effect from 1 April 1996. This will bring it more into line with the private sector's charges for this type of work. The agency will continue to check specific sources of interference to television and radio reception free of charges as part of its regulatory duties.

Fire Safety

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when he will publish the Government's response to the recommendations of the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement in the United Kingdom, which reported to Ministers in June 1994; [18966]

(2) what plans he has to transfer the functions of the Fire Service in respect of general fire safety legislation and enforcement, to *(a)* local authority bodies, *(b)* private inspectors and *(c)* the Health and Safety Executive; and if he will make a statement. [18967]

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have been considering the findings of the review and the views expressed by interested parties, including the deregulation task force. We have also been further considering the fire safety aspects of the EC framework and workplace directives. An announcement on both will be made soon.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what has been the cost of the installation of telephones; and how many were installed for the use of hon. Members' staff at *(a)* Stirling, *(b)* Inverness, *(c)* Aberdeen and *(d)* Kilmarnock in respect of meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee. [17119]

Mr. Beith: Telephones are installed for Members' use at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee when there are insufficient existing lines. These telephones may also be used by Members' staff. Additional telephone lines have been installed as follows:

Stirling: six

Inverness: nil

Aberdeen: three

Kilmarnock: six (ordered for 4 March)

The cost for the installation at Stirling was £919.60. Costs for the other locations are not yet available.

DEFENCE

Departmental Inquiries

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* internal and *(b)* MOD police inquiries have been carried out within his Department since 1993. [17806]

Mr. Soames: Information on the number of internal inquiries carried out within my Department since 1993 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Details of the numbers of MOD police inquiries are contained in the Chief Constables's annual report for 1993–94 and 1994–95, which have been placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Deterrent

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current annual cost of maintaining the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent. [18088]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The running costs of the Polaris boats in 1994–95 was £65 million. The average annual operating cost of Trident over its life is expected to be about £200 million.

Military Equipment Exports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes he has made to his policy relating to the release of information concerning the export of military equipment to Iraq in the last six years; and if he will make a statement. [18534]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is contained in the background note, "Ministerial Accountability and the Release of Information on Defence Related Exports", which was placed in the Library of the House on 26 February 1996.

Sea Water (Charted Depths)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to revise chart datum; on how many occasions since 1 January the charted depth has been lower than the lowest astronomical tide; and by how much charted low water depths were below chart datum during the storms and spring tides of early 1996. [18608]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Hydrographic Office. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Clarke to Mr. Barry Field, dated 6 March 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question (0528H) to the Secretary of State for Defence about chart datum as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office Defence Agency.

There are no plans to revise chart datum in UK waters. Chart Datum (CD) is defined as a level so low that the tide will not frequently fall below it. In the United Kingdom this level is taken as approximately the level of Lowest Astronomical Tide (LAT). LAT is defined as the lowest level which can be predicted to occur under average meteorological conditions and any combination of astronomical conditions.

The UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) maintains and monitors records for three permanently established tide gauges, at Plymouth (Devonport), Portsmouth and Rosyth. These records show that at all three ports the water level has fallen below CD/LAT on one occasion since 1 January 1996. In each case this occurred on 20 February 1996 when at Plymouth the recorded level was 0.18 metres below CD, at Portsmouth 0.10 meters below CD and at Rosyth 0.13 metres below CD. Tidal records for other ports are not held by the UKHO on a permanent basis.

I hope this response is of assistance.

Air Vice-Marshall Howard

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *318*, what *(a)* reprimand or *(b)* penalty was issued to Air Vice-Marshall Howard for his failure to seek permission for a business appointment. [19046]

Mr. Arbuthnot: None. Air Vice-Marshal Howard retired in October 1988 and the Department did not become aware of his consultancy with Tripod Engineering Ltd. until May 1993.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Ex-service Personnel (Pension Appeal Tribunals)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many ex-service people with attributable hearing loss were on waiting lists for hearings by the pension appeal tribunals at the latest date for which figures are available and at the same date in each of the preceeding 10 years; what action he is taking to reduce the average waiting time; and if he will make a statement. [18955]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Specific information about hearing loss cases is not available as the pensions appeal tribunals do not record appeals by the type of disability or injury which is subject to appeal.

In order to reduce waiting times in all cases, extra staff and judicial officers have been appointed which has enabled an increase in tribunal sittings and cases heard. A scheme has been introduced to give priority to appellants aged over 68 and those who are terminally ill. Administrative changes are being made to enable more hearings in the absence of the appellant and more flexible listing procedures are planned which will allow appeals to be heard at short notice.

TREASURY

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations underlay the choice of extracts from the Scott report cited at the top half of the second page of the press release 26/96 issued by his Department on 15 February. [18553]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: They demonstrated that the allegations of deliberately misleading Parliament levelled against my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary before publication of the Scott report were not endorsed by Sir Richard Scott.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the memorandum submitted by his Department in appendix A in volume V of the Scott report, for what reasons he included guns in the first heading on the third page of his departmental press release 26/96 issued on 15 February. [18587]

Mr. Clarke: The items included in parentheses were chosen as good examples in general of lethal equipment.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make changes in the personnel of his Department following criticisms contained in the report of the Scott inquiry. [16570]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *239*.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he had with the Secretary to the Cabinet concerning the Government's response to the Scott inquiry; and where and when such consultations took place. [16608]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* Successive Governments have not disclosed the nature or the specific sources of the advice that they receive from the civil service.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the members of his Department who saw the report of the Scott inquiry before it was presented to the House; and when each saw the report. [16536]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* A small number of civil servants in my Departments had access to the report prior to publication for the purpose of preparing the Government's response. Such access was in accordance with the conditions laid down by the Scott inquiry.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer. what assessment he has made of the United Kingdom's capacity *(a)* to revalue and *(b)* to devalue sterling in a partial EMU excluding the United Kingdom. [17277]

Mrs. Angela Knight: If the UK exercises its option not to join stage 3 of EMU the Government will continue to decide what exchange rate arrangements for Sterling are in the country's best interests.

In this context, the Prime Minister secured agreement at the Madrid European Council that the ECOFIN Council, together with, in their respective fields of competence, the Commission and the European Monetary Institute, study the range of issues raised by the possibility that some countries may not initially participate in the Euro area, including issues related to monetary stability and exchange rate relations.

National Savings

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his plans for the Department for National Savings. [19740]

Mrs. Angela Knight: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has decided that the Department for National Savings should be launched as an executive agency of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 1 July 1996.

As a next steps executive agency, National Savings will continue to provide a source of funds for Government and a safe home for savings. The agency will have more freedom to manage its affairs and clearer responsibilities within a framework of objectives, annual performance targets and resources agreed with Ministers. It will be set clear targets to continue to improve value for money for the taxpayer and the level of service to customers.

Barlow Clowes

Ms Lynne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans his Department has to ensure that former small investors of the investment company run by Barlow Clowes are fully compensated for losses caused by fraudulent activity; [18324]

(2) for what reasons the compensation package offered to former small investors of the investment company run by Barlow Clowes was limited to 90 per cent. of losses. [18380]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* On 19 December 1989, the Government announced their decision to offer substantial payments, without admission of fault or liability, to investors who suffered loss as a result of the Barlow Clowes collapse.

In determining the levels of the ex-gratia payments, the Government considered it important to maintain the principle of co-insurance. Investors must be expected to have some responsibility for their own decisions and, therefore, bear some of the loss themselves. The payments made by the Government provided for the early relief of hardship caused to large numbers of investors. It also ensured swifter relief than would have been the case had investors pursued their interests through the courts.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent on 21 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *157*, if he will set out the improvements in the way the Customs and Excise handles major prosecutions arising from alleged breaches of export control regulations to which he refers. [18533]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The improvements referred to are encapsulated in guidelines which were first issued in July 1991 and later revised and reissued in June 1995. These guidelines cover the handling of sensitive cases, including those concerning breaches of export controls. They reinforce established procedures and introduce a system of formal reviews to ensure that the strength of the evidence and the overall progress of the case are monitored. They formalise a system of consultation and monitoring between investigators, case solicitor and the policy administrators at an early stage in an investigation.

The guidelines provide for a "case co-ordinator" who is appointed from the administrators. They also specify that responsibility for the conduct of a case falls to the Customs solicitor's office and that the case solicitor must regularly review the evidence, reporting regularly to the case co-ordinator in writing and making additional reports as circumstances and changes in the case require.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishermen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will instruct the Director of the Marine Safety Agency *(a)* to meet the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and *(b)* to provide officials to assist the national federation's safety and training committee in respect of EEC regulations on health, hygiene, safety and medical stores. [18857]

Mr. Baldry: I met Viscount Goschen, the Department of Transport Minister responsible for the Marine Safety Agency, on 16 February, to discuss a number of issues that fishermen have raised with me. I know that he is aware of the needs of the fishing industry and we agreed to meet again soon. I also understand that the Marine Safety Agency has arranged a meeting with representatives of the fishermen's federations on 26 March to discuss the industry's concerns about a framework for future consultation.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what hectarage is given up to *(a)* set-aside land and *(b)* each of the 10 highest land area covering crops; and how many kilometres length of river bank runs along set-aside land in (i) the UK, (ii) each other member state of the EU and (iii) the EU in total. [18621]

Mr. Baldry: The latest figures for the area of land set-aside in the EU as of 15 January 1995 are set out in the table.

The latest complete details of the 10 highest land area covering crops are given in section 3.5.2.2. of "The Agricultural Situation in the EU 1994", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The information about the length of river bank that runs along set-aside land in the other member states and the EU in total is not available. In the UK, this information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Land set-aside as of 15 January 1995

Country	*Rotational set-aside (HA)*	*Non-rotational set-aside (HA)*
UK	337,281	266,579
Belgium	14,126	7,860
Denmark	46,503	200,682
France	748,937	977,590
Germany	469,482	855,228
Greece	9,677	8,456
Ireland	19,053	13,107
Italy	182,650	65,042
Luxembourg	1,641	456
Netherlands	9,406	2,441
Portugal	n/a	n/a
Spain	418,767	1.007,202
Austria	57,902	65,268
Finland	153,000	59,000
Sweden	82,855	246,328
EU 15	2.551,280	3.775,239

Fisheries Closures

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what consultations his Department has had with inshore fishermen north of Bridlington in relation to the closure of the Dover sole fishery for boats under 10 m; [19163]

(2) what action he has taken to ensure that future closure of fisheries will not be taken without consultation with the sector of the fishing industry most directly involved. [19164]

Mr. Baldry: Before the closure of the North sea sole fishery to vessels 10 m and under in length from 1 January to 31 March 1996, the Ministry consulted both the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations which represents inshore fishermen in England including those north of Bridlington, and the Yorkshire and Anglia Fish Producers' Organisation based at Bridlington which also includes inshore fishermen among its members. Ministry officials also met with representatives of the NFFO and fishermen from the north-east on 5 February. At the request of the NFFO, the Ministry has agreed to consult directly with the NFFO's constituent organisations on any future proposals to effect a temporary closure of a fishery. Such consultation will not, however, extend to those fishery closures which are necessary because of the full utilisation of quota allocations.

Dredging (The Wash)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to ensure that dredging activities in the Wash will not affect local inshore fisheries. [19165]

Mr. Baldry: MAFF will not agree to any aggregate dredging licence being issued unless it is satisfied that the interests of the marine environment and commercial fishing activities can be adequately protected. Current dredging operations near the Wash are subject to extensive conditions to minimise the effect of the operation including liaison arrangements and post-dredge surveys.

In addition, an extensive monitoring programme is being undertaken to assess the effects of the dredging.

Departmental Suppliers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ensure that his Department identifies the size of its suppliers by the number of their employees. [15607]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 20 February 1996]:* It is planned that the Ministry's resource management system will be able to generate the requisite information within the financial year 1996–97.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which projects in the county of Mid Glamorgan have benefited from lottery funding; and what sums they have received. [17568]

Mr. Sproat: To date, 51 awards totalling £6.7 million have been made to organisations in Mid Glamorgan. I attach a complete list for information.

National Lottery awards in Mid Glamorgan

Body	*Announced*	*Recipient*	*Location*	*Amount*
Arts	24 March 1995	Coliseum Operatic and Drama Society	Aberdare, Mid Glamorgan	2,115.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	8th Cynon Valley Scout Group	Aberdare, Mid Glamorgan	1,200.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Penywaun Community Centre	Aberdare, Mid Glamorgan	3,000.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Bargoed, Aberbargoed and Gilfach Credit Union Ltd.	Bargoed, Mid Glamorgan	69,695.00
NLCB	23 October 1995	Arthritis Care—Bridgend Branch	Bridgend	3,000.00
Sports	15 December 1995	Bridgend Canoe Club	Bridgend	7,058.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Multiple Sclerosis Society	Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan	1,620.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	West Ward Community Association	Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan	40,946.00
Sports	21 December 1995	Port Talbot Borough Council	Cymmer	436,553.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Maerdy Ferndale Tenants Board	Ferndale, Mid Glamorgan	6,200.00
Sports	15 December 1995	Gilfach Goch Community Association	Gilfach Goch	3,930.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Antur Enfys	Maesteg, Mid Glamorgan	144,606.00
Sports	13 October 1995	Clwb Rygbi'r Bala	Meirionnydd	80,547.00
Sports	13 October 1995	Troedyrhiw Boys and Girls Club	Merthyr Tydfil	25,900.00
Sports	13 October 1995	Penydarren Girls and Boys Club	Merthyr Tydfil	112,000.00
NHMF	23 November 1995	Cefn Coed Viaduct Restoration	Merthyr Tydfil	375,000.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Galon Uchaf Residents Association	Merthyr Tydfil, Mid Glamorgan	23,152.00

National Lottery awards in Mid Glamorgan

Body	*Announced*	*Recipient*	*Location*	*Amount*
NLCB	15 December 1995	Cefn Coed Community Centre	Merthyr Tydfil, Mid Glamorgan	37,500.00
Sports	7 June 1995	Abercynon RFC	Mid Glamorgan	295,908.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Llwynypia Primary School Parents Association	Mid Glamorgan	2,910.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Mid Glamorgan Citizen Advocacy	Mid Glamorgan	44,895.00
NLCB	23 October 1995	Mid Glamorgan Referral Scheme	Mid Glamorgan	60,000.00
Arts	13 February 1996	Ynyshir Welfare Band	Mid Glamorgan: Rhondda	32,711.00
Arts	13 February 1996	Penyrheol Modenairs Jazz Band	Mid Glamorgan: Rhymney Valley	2,610.00
Arts	13 February 1996	Taff Ely Borough Council	Mid Glamorgan: Taff Ely	23,484.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Caerphilly and District Victim Support	Newport, Mid Glamorgan	4,700.00
Arts	17 July 1995	Ogmore Valley Male Voice Choir	Ogmore Vale	71,338.00
Sports	07 June 1995	Pencoed Comprehensive School/Ogwr Borough Council	Ogwr	72,255.00
Sports	29 June 1995	Tondu Cricket Club	Ogwr	67,860.00
MC	11 September 1995	Garw	Ogwr	1,150,000.00
MC	11 September 1995	Tondu Industrial Estate	Ogwr	2,000,000.00
Sports	13 October 1995	Ewenny and Corntown Cricket Club	Ogwr	40,000.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Ystrad Rhondda Boys Club	Pentre, Mid Glamorgan	30,000.00
Sports	13 October 1995	Pontyclun Rugby Football Sports Club	Pontyclun	295,737.00
Arts	17 July 1995	Menter Taf Elai	Pontypridd	2,100.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Pontypridd Gingerbread	Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan	3,000.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Age Concern Mid Glamorgan	Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan	180,282.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Gilfach Goch Netball Club	Porth, Mid Glamorgan	22,612.00
Arts	12 May 1995	Rhymney Valley Recreational Activities Club	Rhymney Valley	14,275.00
NLCB	23 October 1995	Rhymney Valley Mind	Rhymney Valley	19,406.00
Arts	18 December 1995	Taff Ely Borough Council	Taff Ely	56,314.00
Sports	03 May 1995	Y Pant Comprehensive School	Taff-Ely	4,500.00
Sports	13 October 1995	Llantrisant Lawn Tennis Club	Taff-Ely	12,351.00
Sports	13 October 1995	Llantwit Fadre Cricket Club	Taff-Ely	39,382.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Clydach Vale Boys Club	Tonypandy, Mid Glamorgan	58,500.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Penygraig Community Project	Tonypandy, Rhondda, Mid Glamorgan	301,999.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Tonyrefail Boys and Girls Club	Tonyrefail, Mid Glamorgan	20,000.00
NLCB	15 December 1995	Cwmpare Community Welfare Association	Treorchy, Mid Glamorgan	147,900.00
Sports	21 July 1995	Cowbridge Comprehensive School	Vale of Glamorgan	2,381.00
Sports	21 July 1995	Penarth Motor Boat and Sailing Club	Vale of Glamorgan	235,212.00
Sports	26 October 1995	Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council	Vale of Glamorgan	28,450.00
Sports	26 October 1995	Llantwit Major Surf Lifesaving Club	Vale of Glamorgan	25,475.00
Total (51 awards)		6,717,094.00		

Arts Council

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent discussions she has had with the Arts Council regarding change to distribution rules to create a stability fund to enable lottery funds to be spent on staff restructuring and if she will make it her policy to resist such a change. [18225]

Mr. Sproat: The Arts Council has approached me with a proposal for a scheme to be financed from the lottery to provide ways of putting arts organisations on a firmer financial basis without entering into continuing commitments for revenue funding. The Arts Council is currently working up detailed proposals in consultation with my Department and others.

Broadcasting Bill

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the consultants employed to advise her Department upon the technical aspects of the Broadcasting Bill, with particular reference to the operation of multiplexes. [17930]

Mr. Sproat: In March 1995 my Department commissioned the National Economic Research Association to prepare a study of methods of media market measurement. The results of this study informed the preparation of Government policy on cross-media ownership which is reflected in the Broadcasting Bill.

My Department did not commission any work from consultants on digital broadcasting, but relied on the technical advice of the Radiocommunications Agency and the broadcasting authorities.

Royal Armouries (International) plc

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what sums have been made available to Royal Armouries (International) plc to create a museum. [19105]

Mr. Sproat: The new Royal Armouries museum, Leeds is being funded by the public and private sectors. My Department is providing £20 million from its existing resources.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which (i) directors and (ii) senior employees of Royal Armouries (International) plc are *(a)* former public servants, *(b)* hon. or former hon. Members and *(c)* Peers. [19107]

Mr. Sproat: General Sir James Glover, formerly Commander-in-Chief, United kingdom Land Forces, is the chairman of Royal Armouries (International) plc. No other director or senior employee falls into any of the categories listed.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what terms armour and other material will be provided to Royal Armouries (International) plc for exhibitions. [19106]

Mr. Sproat: The Royal Armouries is making available a substantial part of its collection to Royal Armouries (International) plc for exhibition in the new Royal Armouries museum, Leeds. Royal Armouries (International) plc will meet the costs of conserving and displaying the collection. The Royal Armouries will retain ownership of the collection.

Oflot (Hospitality Costs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much has been spent by Oflot on official hospitality since its setting up. [18239]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* This is a matter for the Director General of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked the Director General to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which serving civil servants in his Department are presently directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18142]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* Officials in this Department who are currently directors of companies must under departmental rules declare their interest to senior managers who must be satisfied that there is no conflict of interest between officials' public duties and private activities. Staff who disclose relevant interests do so on the understanding that the declaration, like all employment matters, is confidential between them and the Department.

Tourism

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what advice she has supplied to the know-how funds on tourism projects; and in respect of which projects. [16327]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has not provided advice on tourism projects supported by the know-how funds.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many tourists visited *(a)* the north-west of England and *(b)* Lancashire in 1990 and 1995. [16381]

Mr. Sproat: Visitor figures are not yet available for 1995. The figures for 1990 and 1994 are as follows:

Million

	1990	*1994*
North-West		
Domestic visitor trips	7.5	8.6
Domestic visitor expenditure	£755	£1,090
Overseas visitor trips	0.98	1.12
Overseas visitor expenditure	£228	£395
Lancashire		
Domestic visitor trips	3.6	3.7
Domestic visitor expenditure	£450	£552
Overseas visitor trips	0.18	0.18
Overseas visitor expenditure	£43	£51

These figures relate to overnight visitor trips and expenditure. The north-west is defined as the area covered by the north-west tourist board—that is, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what figures he has for each year since 1990, of the number of non-United Kingdom citizens granted *(a)* leave to enter the United Kingdom and *(b)* the right of settlement in the United Kingdom, on the basis of a personal relationship outside marriage with a United Kingdom based person of the opposite sex; and what representations he has received alleging that these arrangements have been, or can be, abused for the purposes of illegal immigration. [18502]

Mr. Kirkhope: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) on 1 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *102*. The corresponding figure for common-law spouses accepted for settlement in 1995 is provisionally 550. The immigration rules do not provide for a person to seek admission to the United Kingdom on the basis of a common-law relationship.

Investigation of applications for leave to remain on the basis of a heterosexual common-law relationship has uncovered abuse of these arrangements.

Crimes Against Children

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he has taken of the recent extension of the powers of coroners to investigate deaths occurring outside the United Kingdom in the context of his consideration of legislation relating to crimes against children committed by United Kingdom citizens abroad. [18612]

Mr. Maclean: Coroners have jurisdiction to inquire into deaths abroad only where the deceased has been returned to England or Wales and there is reason to suppose that the statutory grounds for holding an inquest are met. The evidential requirements and the procedures applicable in coroners' courts are, of course, different from those of criminal courts and it is difficult therefore to make any meaningful comparisons between the two systems.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what external legal advice he has received about enacting United Kingdom legislation relating to crimes committed abroad by United Kingdom citizens against children of other countries. [18611]

Mr. Maclean: As part of its consideration of what measures might be taken to tackle the problem of British nationals committing offences against children in other countries, the Government have sought advice and information from a number of sources. In particular, we have contacted the relevant authorities in a number of countries, and received from them details about their law, and its application, in this area.

We have also received advice from non-governmental organisations. The Coalition on Child Prostitution and Tourism, for example, submitted independent legal advice in connection with one aspect of our research, and has also undertaken to provide further information in connection with the inter-departmental review of extra-territorial jurisdiction, which was announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on 1 February.

Fire Service

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account has been taken of the geographic area in which fire brigades have to operate in calculating the size of management teams. [18657]

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for the management of fire brigade services in their areas is a matter for individual fire authorities.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the percentage shortfall of finance for the provision of fire service pay increases; and what assessment he has made of its impact upon Cheshire county council. [18732]

Mr. Sackville: The impact of national pay awards on individual fire authorities will vary according to their particular circumstances. Like every other fire authority, Cheshire county council has a responsibility to set its budget having regard to all the relevant circumstances, including the size of the nationally agreed pay awards.

Police and Fire Service Pensions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up a common inquiry into the funding of police and fire service pensions. [18678]

Mr. Maclean: No. The Government are not convinced that any radical change is needed on the funding arrangements for police and fire service pensions. In determining support for police authority and local government revenue funding, the Government already take into account the increasing amount which currently needs to be spent on pensions for police officers and firefighters.

For 1996–97, an additional £80 million is being made available to police authorities to help fund pension costs. A refinement of the model on which the pensions element of the police funding formula is based will help to ensure that money available for pensions goes where it is most needed.

For the fire service, £14 million has been added to the total in 1996–97 to assist fire authorities in meeting the cost of firefighters' pensions. An additional indicator to reflect pension costs has been built into the distribution formula for the standard spending assessment total.

The details of police and fire pension schemes have both been under review. The results will shortly be the subject of consultation with police and fire interests.

Immigration Consultants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines exist for former members of immigration and nationality departments who leave the service to become immigration consultants. [18574]

Mr. Kirkhope: There are no specific guidelines. All former members of staff remain bound by the provisions of the Official Secrets Acts and by their duty of confidentiality to the Crown. In addition, all staff who leave are reminded of their obligations under the business appointment rules.

Asylum and Immigration Bill

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received concerning the Asylum and Immigration Bill; and how many have been in favour of the proposals and how many against. [18576]

Miss Widdecombe: In the period 23 November 1995 to 1 March 1996, the asylum division recorded 1,037 representations about the Asylum and Immigration Bill: 800 of these representations have been critical of the Bill and 158 have supported it; the views of the remainder are not recorded. A total of 2,134 names have been submitted on petitions against the Bill. Many of the letters were sent by supporters of a campaign which has been mounted by groups opposed to the Bill and I do not regard them as an accurate barometer of public opinion.

Prisoners' Brains

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons Ronald Kray's brain was not buried with his body; and what consents were obtained. [18908]

Mr. Sackville: I understand that at the time of Ronald Kray's funeral the brain was not buried with the body since it was still subject to an investigation to establish the cause of death. I am informed that the necessary consents were obtained from the coroner for East Berkshire.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18637]

Mr. Howard: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Children's Certificates

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *158*, for what reasons it has not proved possible to move as quickly as originally hoped in respect of children's certificates. [18760]

Mr. Kirkhope: The main difficulties have been divergent practice in different licensing areas, and the absence of firm data on expected take-up rates.

Prisoners' Wives and Families Society

Mr Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide additional financial assistance to the Prisoners' Wives and Families Society; and if he will make a statement. [18948]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Clive Soley, dated 6 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about plans to provide additional financial assistance to the Prisoners' Wives and Families Society.

Although in recent years the Prison Service has made a small number of ex-gratia payments to selected organisations known to be in crisis over funding, there are currently no funds available for financial assistance to organisations supporting prisoner and family ties.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners, having failed to return from authorised leave, are on the run from Buckley Hall prison; and what are the equivalent average figures for other prisons. [18116]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 6 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about how many prisoners, having failed to return from authorised leave, are on the run from Buckley Hall prison, and what are the equivalent average figures for other prisons.

The number of prisoners who failed to return from authorised leave from HM Prison Buckley Hall from its date of opening on 14 December 1994 until 26 February 1996 and who are still unlawfully at large is 10.

The equivalent average figure for similar establishments, male category C training prisons, for the same period is 1.06.

West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the standard spending assessment for the west midlands fire and civil defence authority for each of the last five years; and if he will express the figures in *(a)* real terms and *(b)* as a percentage change on the previous year. [19053]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* The information is as follows:

£ million

	Actual	*Percentage change*	*Real terms*
1992–93	67.29	+7.6	70.55
1993–94	69.07	+2.6	70.36
1994–95	68.35	–1	68.35
1995–96	68.96	+0.9	67.11
1996–97	69.57	+0.9	65.9

1. Standard spending assessment figures include capital financing.
2. Figures up to 1993–94 include civil defence. Subsequent figures do not.

Key Performance Indicators (Prisons)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost per in-use certified normal accommodation place in accordance with key performance indicators during the financial year 1994–95 for *(a)* Blakenhurst, *(b)* Doncaster, *(c)* Bullingdon, *(d)* Holme House and *(e)* Elmley gaols. [18937]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 6 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the cost per in use certified normal accommodation place in accordance with key performance indicators during the financial year 1994–95 for (a) Blakenhurst, (b) Doncaster, (c) Bullingdon, (d) Holme House and (e) Elmley establishments.

The figures are given in the attached table. The figures for public and private sector establishments are not directly comparable. The costs for training, uniforms, equipment, materials, etc are included in costs to private sector establishments but not in those for public sector establishments.

Establishment	*Net current expenditure £ million*	*Average in use CNA*	*Cost per in use CNA place £*
Blakenhurst	11.6	649	17,874
Doncaster	11.6	589	19,694
Bullingdon/Oxford	14.4	746	19,303
Elmley	11.4	633	18,009
Holme House	11.9	649	18,336

The cost per in use CNA place is calculated by dividing net current expenditure by average in use CNA.

Prison Administration Expenditure

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of headquarters administration expenditure is included in the cost per certified normal accommodation place in public prisons. [18938]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 6 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking what proportion of headquarters administration expenditure is included in the cost per certified normal accommodation place in public prisons.

The costs per baseline certified normal accommodation place quoted in the annual report for individual public sector prisons do not include any element of headquarters administration expenditure.

The cost per place figure for the Service does include headquarters expenditure.

Prison Assaults

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which local prison in England and Wales had the highest assault rate during the period April to September 1995. [18940]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 6 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking, which local prison in England and Wales had the highest assault rate between April and September 1995.

Provisional information shows that the female section of Risley prison, a multi purpose prison in Warrington, had the highest assault rate among all local establishments at 48 per 100 population, between April and September 1995.

Visa Restrictions (Hong Kong)

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that holders of the new Hong Kong Special Administrative region passport will be able to enter the United Kingdom without visa restrictions; and if he will make a statement. [18941]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) on 4 March 1996, *Official Report,* column 62.

Standard Spending Assessment (Fire Services)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what factors the standard spending assessment for fire services is decided; and what plans he has to change them. [19052]

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* The fire standard spending assessment is distributed in England by means of a formula which takes into account a number of factors including population, population density and fire calls. From 1996–97 it has been adjusted to include factors for firefighters' pensions and fire safety enforcement.

The formula is reviewed each year in consultation with local authority representatives and this process is about to start for 1997–98.

Census Questions

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) of 18 December, *Official Report,* column *940,* what consideration is being given to the classification of people from Northern Ireland within a possible Irish category in the next census. [18527]

Mr. Horam: I have been asked to reply.

It has now been decided to test various changes to the ethnic origin question, including incorporating a separate Irish category. To date no case has been made by users to classify people from Northern Ireland separately and therefore this is currently not being considered.

Young Offenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people aged *(a)* 15 and *(b)* 16 years were remanded into prison custody in 1995 and in each of the last 10 years; and how many in each age group and in each year subsequently received a custodial sentence. [18376]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alun Michael, dated 6 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of 15 and 16 year olds who were remanded into prison custody in 1995 and in each of the last 10 years; and how many subsequently received a custodial sentence.

The available information is given in the attached tables. The remand receptions include those received either as untried prisoners or as convicted unsentenced prisoners; those received both as untried and convicted unsentenced are counted once.

For 1994, separate figures for untried and convicted unsentenced receptions are given in table 3.10 of "Prison statistics England and Wales 1994" Cm. 3087, a copy of which is in the Library.

The information on the proportion of young remand prisoners in England and Wales subsequently receiving a custodial sentence is given in table 2.9 of "Prison statistics England and Wales 1991", a copy of which is also in the Library. This has been extended to include 1992 and 1993 data; later results are not available.

The number of 15 and 16-year-olds remanded into prison custody, 1986 to 1995

	Males Aged 14 to 16	*Females Aged 14 to 16*
1986	1,702	5
1987	1,861	3
1988	1,604	12
1989	1,459	6

	Males		Females	
	Aged 15	Aged 16	Aged 15	Aged 16
1990	380	883	0	3
1991	412	752	2	2
1992	377	720	0	1
1993	453	906	1	1
1994	635	1,100	0	3
1995[1]	640	1,242	2	5

[1] Provisional.

Receptions into Prison Service establishments of untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners aged less than 17: proportion known to have been subsequently received under sentence: by type of first remand and sex, 1986 to 1993

Percentage

	First received as untried and not subsequently received as convicted unsentenced	First received as untried and subsequently received as convicted unsentenced	First received as convicted unsentenced
Males			
1986	55	73	58
1987	50	68	62
1988	43	63	46
1989	32	53	31
1990	32	48	47
1991	28	60	50
Females			
1986	—	—	67
1987	—	—	—
1988	—	50	60
1989	50	—	100
1990	—	—	50
1991	—	—	100

Percentage

	Proportion of male remand receptions subsequently received under sentence		Proportion of female remand receptions subsequently received under sentence	
	Aged 15	Aged 16	Aged 15	Aged 16
1992	37	42	—	100
1993	42	49	100	—

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

House of Commons (Cars)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will instruct drivers working in the Government car pool that car engines are not to be kept running while the car is parked within the precincts of the House. [18264]

Mr. Freeman: This is an operational matter on which I have asked the chief executive of the Security Facilities Executive—SAFE—to write to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from J. C. King to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 5 March 1996:

I have been asked by Mr Freeman, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (who now has Ministerial responsibility for the Government Car Service (GCS), to let you have a response to your Parliamentary Question concerning the running of GCS car engines within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster. I am the Chief Executive of the Agency with operational responsibility for the GCS.

Government Car Service drivers remain under clear instructions, while parked with in the precincts of the Palace of Westminster, to keep their vehicle engines running to a minimum consistent with passenger and security requirements. To reinforce this, I have arranged for GCS Management to issue a fresh notice to all GCS drivers.

"Guidance on Guidance"

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place a copy of "Guidance on Guidance": "An Index of Useful Documents", in the Library. [18617]

Mr. Freeman: Yes. As soon as the current version of "Guidance on Guidance: An Index of Useful Documents" has been printed, copies will be placed in the Library.

Illiteracy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those areas of public service or activity where illiteracy is a disqualification from participation. [18782]

Mr. Freeman: Information on the public service as a whole is not held centrally. As far as the civil service is concerned, Departments and agencies are responsible for prescribing the recruitment criteria, including literacy skills, necessary to ensure that recruits are able to do the work required.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library details of fiches d'impact sent to Government Departments by the European Commission. [18738]

Mr. Freeman: Details of fiches d'impact sent to individual Government Departments are not kept centrally.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which serving civil servants in his Department are presently directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18144]

Mr. Freeman: Staff in the Departments and agencies for which I am responsible, and other areas which fall to the Cabinet Office vote, are required to declare any business interest, such as directorships, which might conflict with their oficial duties and to comply with any subsequent instructions regarding the retention, disposal and management of such interests. It is not my practice to disclose information on the personal interests of officials.

Non-executive directorships for civil servants for developmental reasons or on an ex officio basis are encouraged under a Government-sponsored scheme. They provide an opportunity for interchange between the civil

service and outside organisations, particularly with the private sector. At present, however, no officials of the Cabinet Office hold directorships under this scheme.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which serving civil servants in his Department are presently directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18145]

The Deputy Prime Minister: For these purposes, my office forms part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office (Privatisation)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy that public libraries will receive a 50 per cent. discount on official publications after the privatisation of HMSO. [19231]

Mr. Freeman: I can confirm that there are no plans to end the current arrangements for subsidising public libraries in this respect. After privatisation, the subsidy will continue to be administered from within Government by the residual HMSO, and will be entirely separate from the privatised business.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy that no restriction will be imposed on the copying of official publications for private study after the privatisation of HMSO. [19233]

Mr. Freeman: The current arrangements for administering Crown copyright allow documents covered by it to be copied for purposes of private study. As I explained in the answer I gave to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 9 February, *Official Report*, column *370*, privatisation of HMSO will not alter these arrangements, and control of Crown copyright will remain in the Government.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the safeguards he proposes to ensure the continued efficiency of the distribution of official publications after the privatisation of HMSO. [19276]

Mr. Freeman: The criteria for selecting the winning bid for HMSO will place great emphasis on the commitment and ability of each bidder to meet customers' requirements.

Arrangements for distributing official publications, whether by HMSO or otherwise, are determined by the originating Department. After privatisation, each customer will have a legally binding contract with the privatised stationery office, or another supplier, for those services. The contracts can specify all aspects of a customer's requirements.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the findings made by consultants to estimate the probable effect of the proposed privatisation of HMSO on the prices to the public of official publications. [19278]

Mr. Freeman: There is no reason to believe that prices of official publications will be adversely affected by privatisation. HMSO's publications business already operates on a fully commercial basis, receiving no subsidy, and meets all of its costs by charging customers. After privatisation, it will remain open to originating Departments to specify cover prices, where necessary, in their contracts with the stationery office or elsewhere.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he will take to ensure that the "Daily List" and other lists of official publications, include the same material and are produced to the same time scales at present, after the privatisation of HMSO. [19277]

Mr. Freeman: The "Daily List" and other HMSO bibliographic information is maintained as it is essential for the operation of HMSO's publication and distribution functions. It is also in the commercial interests of HMSO to make the information generally available as it increases access to its products. The same internal needs and commercial pressures will apply to the new owner.

Civil Servants (Conduct)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the implications for the civil service of the findings of the Scott report. [19287]

Mr. Freeman: The Government's proposals for taking forward the recommendations of the Scott report were set out by the President of the Board of Trade and myself during the debate on 26 February. A number of these will have implications for the civil service.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to inquire into the conduct of individual civil servants following the publication of the Scott report. [19281]

Mr. Freeman: Where civil servants criticised in the Scott report have acted conscientiously, in good faith, and in accordance with Government policy, disciplinary action would not be appropriate. If any civil servants appeared to fall outside this category, disciplinary action would be considered in accordance with normal departmental procedures.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Africa (Criminal and Social Issues)

19. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next meet African heads of state to discuss criminal and social issues affecting their countries. [17279]

Mr. Hanley: Criminal and social issues are a normal feature of our regular discussions with African Governments and, when appropriate, African heads of state.

Jasrrunt Singh Kalra

21. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received from the Indian Government regarding the disappearance of Jasrrunt Singh Kalra. [17283]

Mr. Hanley: The Indian Government have told us that the case is sub judice. The Supreme Court has asked the Indian Central Bureau of Investigation to investigate the case. We understand that it is expected to report in the next few weeks.

Former Yugoslavia

23. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European counterparts concerning the situation in the former Yugoslavia. [17285]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: European Union Foreign Ministers had their most recent discussion on peace implementation in former Yugoslavia at the 26 February Foreign Affairs Council. Discussion will continue at an informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on 9 to 10 March.

Intergovernmental Conference

24. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts about the forthcoming intergovernmental conference on the future of the European Union. [17286]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has regular discussions with his European counterparts about the IGC, most recently at the Foreign Affairs Council on 25 to 26 February in Brussels.

32. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the first meeting of the 1996 IGC will take place; and how long it is scheduled to last. [17294]

Mr. Davis: The first meeting of the IGC is scheduled to take place in Turin on 29 March. The IGC has no fixed end-date.

33. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to propose treaty amendments at the intergovernmental conference to make more open the proceedings of the institutions of the European Union. [17295]

Mr. Davis: We are committed to making the European Union institutions more open and have supported a number of initiatives to achieve this, for example, by making more Council documents publicly available. We are considering how we might take this forward at the IGC.

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the content of Her Majesty's Government's proposed White Paper on the intergovernmental conference of the European Union. [17274]

Mr. Davis: The White Paper will set out the Government's approach to the forthcoming intergovernmental conference.

Council of Ministers (Majority Voting)

28. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the advantages and disadvantages of majority voting in the Council of Ministers of the European Union. [17290]

Mr. David Davis: Qualified majority voting already applies to most of the day-to-day decisions taken by the European Community. It has been a useful factor, for example in completing the single market. But the Government see no case for extending qualified majority voting further.

Export Licensing

29. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to change the criteria used for recommending countries for inclusion on the list of countries for which special export licensing procedures are required; and if he will make a statement. [17291]

Mr. David Davis: The list is drawn up in accordance with foreign policy objectives, international understandings or embargoes to which we are party, the non-proliferation credentials of the country concerned and the effectiveness of its export controls. A revised list was published on 19 July 1995 and is printed in the *Official Report*. The list is kept under constant review. The Government will consider future arrangements for export control legislation in the light of comments by Sir Richard Scott and the responses to the consultation paper announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Political Representation of Women

30. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met members of the European Parliament to discuss the political representation of women. [17292]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, other Ministers and I regularly meet Members of the European Parliament to discuss a wide range of issues. Our discussions have not included the political representation of women.

Sudan

31. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government and opposition groups in Sudan. [17293]

Mr. Hanley: We have regular diplomatic contacts in Khartoum and London. In addition, there are regular meetings with opposition groups in London, Cairo, Khartoum and Nairobi. Most recently, in January our ambassador accompanied the Bishop of Bradford to the Nuba mountains where they met the Wali (regional governor), state ministers and provincial commissioners.

United States Relations

34, **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current state of relations between the United Kingdom and the United States; and if he will make a statement. [17296]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Relations between the United Kingdom and the United States are excellent.

United Nations (Financial Position)

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he is putting forward to improve the financial position of the UN. [17275]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In his speech to the UN summit last October, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stressed the importance of prompt and full payment of contributions; clearance of arrears; reform of the system of assessment; and greater focus on efficiency. Together with the French Government, we have now developed a package of proposals reflecting these concerns and designed to resolve the UN financial crisis. This package has been endorsed and adopted by the EU.

Greece and Turkey

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to assist in preventing the rise of conflict between Greece and Turkey. [17280]

Mr. David Davis: We are encouraging both sides to eschew provocative actions or statements and look for ways of developing constructive dialogue. We have suggested to both that, on the specific question of Imia, the best way forward must be to submit the dispute to arbitration.

Embassies and Missions (EU)

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the embassies and missions established by the European Union to date, indicating the total cost, including staff and administration costs for the last year for which figures are available. [18768]

Mr. David Davis: The following list of all European Commission delegations in third countries is taken from the latest version of the Commission's external directory—the asterisk indicates countries where the Commission delegate is non-resident.

Albania
Algeria
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda*
Argentina
Australia
Austria
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belize*
Benin
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cameroon
Canada
Cap Verde
Central African Republic
Chile
China
Colombia
Comores
Congo
Costa Rica
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Djibouti
Dominican Republic
Dutch Antilles
Egypt
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Fiji
Gabon
Gambia
Georgia
Ghana
Grenada*
Guinea
Guinea Bissau
Equatorial Guinea
Guyana
Haiti
Hong Kong
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Israel
Ivory Coast
Jamica*
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Korea
Lesotho
Lebanon
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Malta
Morocco
Mauritius
Mauritania
Mexico
Mozambique
Namibia

New Caledonia*
Niger
Nigeria
Norway
Occupied Territories
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Sao Tome E Principe*
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Slovakia
Slovenia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Sudan
Suriname
Swaziland
Switzerland
Syria
Tanzania
Tchad
Thailand
Togo
Tonga*
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Uganda
Ukraine
Uruguay
USA Washington
USA New York
Vanuatu*
Venezuela
Vietnam
Western Samoa*
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe

The latest costs are shown in the 1996 European Community Budget. The total cost of all European Commission delegations in third countries in 1996 is 179.712 mecu or £151.03 million, comprising 72,247 mecu or £60.72 million in salaries, allowances and reimbursements of expenses for officials and temporary staff, and 107.465 mecu or £90.31 million in other non-staff related costs. This budget comes under the administration section of the EC Budget—budget title A–6, pages 506–514 of the *Official Journal* of 29 January 1996.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the negotiations on Cyprus's application for membership of the EU. [17266]

Mr. David Davis: We welcome the prospect of accession and think it should contribute to a settlement. The Madrid European Council reaffirmed that accession negotiations will start six months after the conclusion of the IGC and taking account of its results.

East Timor

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to raise the violation of human rights in East Timor by the Indonesian Government at *(a)* the forthcoming 52 session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and *(b)* other intergovernmental conferences. [18848]

Mr. Hanley: Together with our EU partners, we shall raise our concerns about the human rights situation in East Timor at the 52nd session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and at all other appropriate international forums.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a Minister of the British Government last visited the Turks and Caicos Islands; and for what purpose. [19140]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The last ministerial visit to the Turks and Caicos Islands was in April 1995, when the Solicitor-General paid a familiarisation visit to the islands, en route to the Caribbean Dependent Territories Attorney-General's conference in the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff presently serve in the Turks and Caicos Islands; and of what grades. [19141]

Mr. Hanley: Three Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff are serving in the Turks and Caicos Islands. One diplomatic service grade 4 officer; one diplomatic service grade 7 officer; and one secretary.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received from Ministers in the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands about the conduct of the governor of the islands; and from which Ministers. [19142]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: On 20 May 1994, the then Chief Minister wrote to the then Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd). The Chief Minister subsequently wrote on 27 June 1994 to the then Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, claiming that his original letter was meant as a direct criticism not of the governor, but of the balance of constitutional powers.

On 21 February this year, all six Ministers of the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands, together with the other elected members, and two out of the three nominated members of the Legislative Council, signed a petition to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary demanding the recall of the governor.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands; and if he discussed with him the incidence of corruption in the islands. [19143]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) the then Foreign Secretary, met the Governor-designate of the Turks and Caicos Islands in May 1993, shortly before Mr. Bourke took up his appointment. They discussed the importance of good government in the islands, but did not discuss specific instances of corruption.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ensure that the people of Gibraltar are represented at the European Parliament. [19280]

Mr. David Davis: Annex II of the 1976 EC Act concerning direct elections to the European Parliament states that the UK would apply its provisions only in respect of the UK. We are committed to ensuring that Gibraltar's views are fully taken into account through the UK in EU decision making.

Paris Embassy (Meetings)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report*, column *758*, if staff of Her Majesty's embassy in Paris met Mr. de Kemoularia or Jean Pierrè Macé in 1995 and 1996; who was present at the meetings; and for what purpose they were held. [19279]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Embassy staff had no working meetings with Mr. Kemoularia during the period in question, although he attended several social events at the embassy. The embassy has no record of any meetings with Mr. Macé.

European Parliament

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which areas of the EU residents do not elect representatives to the European Parliament. [19286]

Mr. David Davis: Representation in the European Parliament covers all member states of the EU. For the purposes of EP elections, the UK member state is defined as the United Kingdom only, and does not include those European territories for whose external relations it is responsible.

Angola

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress of the peace process in Angola. [17278]

Mr. Hanley: The UN Secretary-General, in his report to the Security Council of 2 February, acknowledged substantial delays in the implementation of the Lusaka protocol, but considered that sufficient progress had been made to recommend the renewal of the mandate of UNAVEM III. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Overseas Development urged both sides to reach a speedy conclusion to the peace process during her visit to Angola on 19 to 21 February.

India

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indian Government concerning the deaths and injuries suffered by civilians in Azad Kashmir on 26 January from fire across the UN line of control from Indian-occupied Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [18897]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* We have not made any specific representations to the Indian Government about this incident. We regret the tragic loss of life that occurred during an exchange of fire that day. We have repeatedly urged both sides to exercise restraint, and to resolve their difference over Kashmir through bilateral dialogue.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indian Government about assassination attempts made against Kashmir leaders living in Indian-occupied Kashmir with special reference to Yasin Malik; what reports he has received about the identity of those responsible for such attacks; and if he will make a statement. [18896]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* The British high commission in India is in contact with the Indian Government about the security situation in Kashmir. The precise identity of those responsible for the attack on Yasin Malik and others in Anantnag on 21 February remains unclear. HMG condemn all such acts of violence in Kashmir.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has requested from the United Nations concerning information from UN observers on the line of control between Kashmir and

Azad Kashmir concerning the shelling on 26 January of Azad Kashmir from Indian-occupied Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [18898]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* We would expect the UN military observers group to report an incident of this nature to the UN Secretary-General in the normal way. The incident has not so far been brought before the Security Council.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which serving civil servants in his Department are presently directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if the annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18137]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 1 February, *Official Report*, column *854*.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answers given in another place on 22 January, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column *51*, by the Minister for State for Overseas Development and on 1 February, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns *119–122* by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence. In accordance with Cabinet Office guidance, such non-executive directorships are unpaid.

SCOTLAND

Civil Servants (Interviews)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those civil servants, their names and Departments who in the past year *(a)* have given on-the-record interviews to (i) radio and (ii) television and *(b)* have written articles or letters for newspaper correspondence columns, indicating in each case the relevant date. [13281]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

Civil servant	*Date*	*Item*
The Scottish Office		
Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department		
Tony Cameron	16 June 1995	Radio interview for BBC Scotland on the Agriculture Council
Ian Campbell	5 February 1995	TV interview on fisheries
Ian Conroy	15 November 1995	TV interview for BBC "Here and Now" programme on regulatory role in Dundee local authority incinerator
Derek Saward	13 November 1995	TV and radio interviews on fisheries research vessel survey on Beaufort's Dyke
Central Services		
Shelagh Quinn	22 February 1995	STV "The Time and the Place" programme on equal opportunities
Colin MacDonald	21 November 1995	BBC TV "Frontline Scotland" programme on ageism
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency		
Captain Tom Henderson	5 February 1995	TV interview on fisheries
Captain Tom Henderson	5 February 1996	BBC "Panorama" programme
Captain Douglas Temple	14 January 1996	Radio 5 Live programme
J. Torrie	5 February 1996	BBC "Panorama" programme
Development Department		
David Dare	9 March 1995	BBC Radio Scotland on planning issues
Historic Scotland		
Gordon Barclay	Date unavailable	Central FM Radio on the work of a castle custodian
Nick Bridgeland	Date unavailable	Radio 4 "Breakaway" programme on Jedburgh abbey
Doreen Grove	Date unavailable	BBC "Report Scotland" on world war II defences
John Hume	Date unavailable	BBC Radio Scotland on historic lighthouses
Neil Hynd	Date unavailable	Scotland on Sunday briefing on Edinburgh castle
Frank Lawrie	Date unavailable	BBC Radio Scotland Tom Morton programme on listed policy
Frank Lawrie	Date unavailable	Radio 5 Live programme on doors open day
Frank Lawrie	Date unavailable	*Evening News* article on restoration of ruined castles
Bob McIlwraith	Date unavailable	BBC Radio Shetland on Sealloway castle
Bob McIlwraith	Date unavailable	BBC Radio 5 Live on Fort George
Ingvall Maxwell	Date unavailable	"Country Life" interview on Duff house
Graeme Munro	Date unavailable	Talk Radio on historic Scotland
Graeme Munro	Date unavailable	"Scotland on Sunday" briefing on Edinburgh castle
Chris Watkins	Date unavailable	BBC "Good Morning Scotland" programme on Braveheart party in Stirling
Education and Industry Department		
Nisbet Gallacher (HM Chief Inspector of Schools)	19 June 1995	Interview for *The Times Educational Supplement Scotland* on "Higher Still"
Nisbet Gallacher	31 August 1995	On the record briefing for all education correspondence on publication of "Higher Still" Framework document
Douglas Osler	1 March 1995	Interview for *The Scotsman* on lay members of HMDSCI inspection teams
Douglas Osler	10 April 1995	Interview for *The Times Educational Supplement Scotland* on lay members of HMDSCI inspection teams
Dr. John Rigg	10 October 1995	Newspaper article on Government expenditure and revenue in Scotland 1993–94
Department of Health		
Dr. Robert Kendell (Chief Medical Officer for Scotland)	1 August 1995	TV and radio interviews on AIDS/HIV spending
Dr. Robert Kendell	7 August 1995	Radio interview for SCOT FM on maintaining medical excellence
Dr. Robert Kendell	9 August 1995	BBC TV "Reporting Scotland" interview on AIDS/HIV spending
Dr. Robert Kendell	5 September 1995	TV and radio interviews on annual report
Dr. Robert Kendell	14 November 1995	BBC Radio Scotland on BSE and CJD
Dr. Robert Kendell	7 December 1995	BBC Radio Scotland on BSE and CJD
Dr. Robert Kendell	18 January 1996	TV and radio interviews on coronary heart disease report
Geoff Scaife (Chief Executive, NHS in Scotland)	9 October 1996	TV and Radio interviews on crisis in the NHS
Geoff Scaife	18 January 1996	Letter to editor of *The Scotsman* and *Herald* on staffing in the NHS
Geoff Scaife	25 January 1996	Letter to editor of *Press and Journal* and *Daily Record* on rate of return on capital within NHS trusts
Geoff Scaife	29 January 1996	TV and radio interviews on cardiac surgery waiting times
Robin Wild (Chief Dental Officer)	18 December 1995	STV—launch of oral health strategy for Scotland
Home Department		
John Boyd (HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary)	1 June 1995	Two radio interviews on annual report.
Clive Fairweather (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in Scotland)	13 April 1995	Radio interviews on report on women offenders.
Clive Fairweather	29 June 1995	Radio interviews on report on Dungavel prison.
Clive Fairweather	29/30 June 1995	TV and radio interviews on prison suicides.
Clive Fairweather	31 August 1995	TV and radio interviews on annual report.
Clive Fairweather	12 October 1995	TV and radio interviews on Barlinnie prison brutality.
Clive Fairweather	15 October 1995	Radio interview on law and order.
Clive Fairweather	4 December 1995	Radio interview on prison suicides.
Clive Fairweather	7 December 1995	Radio interview on prison suicides.
Clive Fairweather	17 January 1996	Radio interview on prison work.
Clive Fairweather	25/26 January 1996	TV and radio interviews on Peterhead prison.
Jim Innes (Director of Roads)	25 July 1995	Radio interview on route action plans.
Jim Innes	24 November 1995	Interview on A74 opening.
Jim Innes	6 December 1995	TV interview on M8 extension.
Jim Innes	12 December 1995	TV interview on M8 extension.

The Scottish Prison Service

The chief executive, directors, governors, senior managers and members of the Scottish Prison Service communications branch, as appropriate, respond to media inquiries and/or comment about operational matters on a daily basis. No central record is kept of the number of occasions on which this occurs, nor of the specific content of these contacts since this could be done only at disproportionate cost.

EDS Ltd.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those contracts his Department currently holds with EDS, indicating for each the *(a)* date of inception,*(b)* value and *(c)* duration. [17454]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has no contracts with EDS.

Pupil Exclusions

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many schoolchildren were excluded *(a)* permanently and *(b)* temporarily from schools in (i) Inverclyde and (ii) Strathclyde in 1995. [18047]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information on the number of school children excluded temporarily from schools is not available. The available information, consistent with that set out in the report on attendance and absence in Scottish schools 1994–95, published by the audit unit of HM inspectorate of schools, is as follows.

	Number of pupils permanently excluded from schools in 1994–95	*Number of half days of temporary exclusions from schools from January–July 1995*
Inverclyde	0	4,515
Strathclyde	0	110,060

Infertility

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which health authorities provide NHS treatment for *(a)* assisted and *(b)* surrogate pregnancy for childless couples; and if he will make a statement; [17966]

(2) what plans he has to designate *(a)* assisted and *(b)* surrogate pregnancies for childless couples on the NHS as clinically essential; and if he will make a statement. [17968]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information about which health boards provide NHS treatment for all assisted and surrogate pregnancies is not available centrally. It is for individual health boards to decide whether to purchase high technology infertility procedures and surrogate pregnancy services.

Waste Disposal

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the number of landfill sites by district council; [18277]

(2) if he will list by district council area, the number of tonnes of special waste arising and deposits for each of the last four years; [18281]

(3) if he will list, for each year, for the last four years, by district council area, the number of tonnes of special waste arising *(a)* within the district and deposited within the district, *(b)* within the district and exported out of the district and *(c)* outside the district and deposited within the district. [18276]

Mr. Kynoch: Data on waste management in Scotland are published in the Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin, "Waste Collection, Disposal and Regulation Statistical". The most recent issue of this document, containing data for 1993, was published in December 1995. A copy is in the House Library.

Table B18 of the bulletin shows the number of waste management facilities by district and islands councils. Landfill operations form the bulk of these numbers but are not specifically identified. Of the 1,054 licences and resolutions in table B18, a total of 635 were associated with landfills—458 licences and 177 resolutions.

Table B9 of the bulletin shows the quantity of special waste arisings and deposits in Scotland for 1993. Corresponding information for 1992 is detailed in table B9 of the 1992 bulletin, a copy of which is in the House Library. There is no district level information available before 1992. Table A2.2 of the 1993 bulletin provides a time series of data over the five-year period 1989 to 1993 for the total quantities of special waste arising, imported, exported and retained in Scotland. Table B22 of the 1993 bulletin and table B21 of the 1992 bulletin also contain relevant information on special waste.

Household Waste Recycling

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the percentage of household waste recycled for each year in Scotland over the past five years; and if he will make a statement regarding the target of recycling 25 per cent. of all household waste by the end of the century; [18279]

(2) which Scottish local authorities currently operate recycling schemes; and what was the expenditure for each. [18280]

Mr. Kynoch: The table shows the reported rate of household waste collected for recycling over the four-year period 1990 to 1993 in the form of a percentage of all household waste.

	Household waste collected for recycling (percentage of all household waste)
1989	No data
1990	2.5
1991	3.3
1992	3.9
1993	4.1

As regards the target of recycling 25 per cent. of all household waste in the UK by the end of the century, it should be noted that provision of local recycling facilities is a matter for local authorities and the private and voluntary sectors. The Government's initiative on producer responsibility for waste packaging will play a key role in developing local infrastructure and encouraging higher rates of recycling, together with other factors, such as the rising costs of waste disposal, including the proposed landfill tax, and improved markets for secondary raw materials.

There are recycling activities in all district and islands councils areas. There are no current data available on expenditure relating to these schemes.

Monofilament Nets

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to seek a Europe-wide agreement on the use of monofilament nets; and if he will make a statement. [18287]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Government have no plans to seek such an agreement, but I have written to the European Commission to notify it of our proposal to allow a derogation for the carriage of large-mesh monofilament nets in Scottish waters.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he will be taking to ensure that lifting the ban on the use of large mesh monofilament nets by Scottish boats will not conflict with Government commitments to the conservation of marine wildlife under the agreement on conservation of small cetaceans in the Baltic and North seas, the European Union wild birds directive (79/409/EEC) and the European Union habitats directive (92/43/EEC); and if he will make a statement. [18286]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Arrangements for monitoring by-catches of marine mammals are already in place and will be extended to any large mesh monofilament nets that are used. These nets are unlikely to pose a threat to marine bird species as we expect the nets to be bottom set in deep water.

Forestry Commission (Legal Advisers)

Mr. McFall: To ask, the Secretary of State for Scotland for what length of time Pearsons has been the principal legal advisers to the Forestry Commission; and for how long he estimates this relationship will be maintained. [18566]

Mr. Kynoch: Pearsons has provided legal services to the Forestry Commission in Scotland for some 70 years. The Commission recently invited tenders for this work and has appointed another firm of solicitors with effect from 1 April.

Further Education Colleges

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funds are being made available to further education colleges for the administration costs that will be incurred from the transfer of responsibility for bursary administration from local authorities. [18615]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Following consultation with local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, £45 million was transferred from the aggregate external finance settlement to fund the provision of further education bursaries in colleges in Scotland in 1996–97. This settlement is based on historic trends of local authority expenditure and includes an element to reflect administrative costs.

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what transfer arrangements have been made for bursary administration staff in local authorities in respect of the transfer of this function to further education colleges. [18614]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: It is the responsibility of each college's board of management to determine its staffing requirements for this new responsibility. The Association of Scottish Colleges has encouraged its members to ensure that local authorities and their bursary staff are made aware of opportunities as they arise. Liaison has also been maintained with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

NHS Dentists

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients were registered with NHS dental practices in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1995, showing this as a percentage of the population of Scotland. [17986]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Registration of patients with a dentist was introduced in October 1990. Patients are registered with an individual dentist, not a dental practice. The information requested is in the table.

Patients registered with general dental practitioners in Scotland

Year[1]	*Number of registered patients at 31 December*	*Registered patients as a percentage of population*
1990	812,057	15.9
1995	2,649,100	51.7

[1] Registration was introduced only from October 1990.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dental practices in Scotland have accepted new NHS patients in 1993, 1994 and 1995. [17987]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No information is held on dental practices. General dental practitioners are independent contractors who are free to decide whether to offer NHS treatment to each individual patient. The table shows the number of individual dentists who accepted new NHS patients or NHS patients on referral during each of the years in question.

General dental practitioners in Scotland who accepted new or referred NHS patients

	Dentists
1993	1,749
1994	1,773
1995	1,799

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment's letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 12 January, what conclusions he has reached in respect of the official study of the Scottish Crop Research Institute report on the computation of safe isolation distances for field-grown genetically modified crops. [17907]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The findings contained in the final report of Scottish Office funded research projects are normally published to inform the wider scientific community and the industries which might benefit. Research conclusions may also have a bearing on policy or legislative considerations and provide a justification for further study.

The conclusion from this particular four year project is that viable pollen will disperse to distances of up to 1.5 km from source. This broadly supports the accepted

views on pollen dispersal which are taken into account in each relevant case for the release of genetically modified crops.

Homeworkers

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of homeworkers in Scotland and *(b)* how many are (i) self-employed and (ii) employers. [19167]

Mr. Kynoch: The Labour Force Survey estimates that in spring 1995 there were 44,000 homeworkers in Scotland working at their own homes. Of these, 27,000 were self-employed. No reliable estimate is available for Scotland for the number of homeworkers who were employers.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(c)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntarily. [16179]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* The information requested is as follows.

All executive NDPBs sponsored by my Department have a statutory base except for the following which have no statutory base: Hannah Research Institute, Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, Rowett Research Institute, Scottish Crop Research Institute, Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee, Scottish Community Education Council, Scottish Film Council, Scottish Further Education Unit, Scottish Vocational Education Council and those which operate under royal warrant or charter—i.e. Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Sports Council.

The river purification boards and Livingston development corporation admit members of the public to board meetings on a voluntary basis.

The following bodies hold on a voluntary basis open meetings or open days which may be attended by members of the public: Crofters' Commission, Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee, National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Sports Council.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests, indicating in each case if this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [16828]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* The information required is as follows.

Those executive NDPBs which are covered by the Companies Acts are required to publish annual reports and some other bodies are also required by the statute creating them to publish annual reports. These bodies are:

Hannah Research Institute
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute
Moredun Research Institute
Rowett Research Institute
Scottish Crop Research Institute
River Purification Boards
Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board
Scottish Council for Educational Technology
Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust
Scottish Seed Potato Development Council
Scottish Vocational Education Council.

In a number of other cases the body is required by statute to produce an annual report on the exercise and performance of its functions for the Secretary of State which he is obliged to lay before Parliament. These bodies are:

Crofters Commission
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland
National Museums of Scotland—required by statute at least every three years, but voluntarily produces an annual report
National Galleries of Scotland—required by statute every three years, but voluntarily produces an annual report
New Town development corporations
Red Deer Commission
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board—as part of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries annual report, which is a Command Paper
Scottish Enterprise
Scottish Examination Board
Scottish Homes
Scottish Legal Aid Board
Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Tourist Board.

Some bodies publish reports on a non-statutory basis. They are:

Accounts Commission for Scotland
Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee
National Library of Scotland
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
Scottish Arts Council
Scottish Community Education Council
Scottish Film Council
Scottish Further Education Unit
Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
Scottish Medical Practices Committee
Scottish Sports Council.

Those bodies which are required to publish their annual accounts under the terms of the Companies Acts, the Friendly Societies Acts or other legislation are:

Hannah Research Institute
Macaulay Land Research Institute
Moredun Research Institute
Rowett Research Institute
Scottish Crop Research Institute
River Purification Boards
Scottish Council for Educational Technology

Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust

Scottish Seed Potato Development Council

Scottish Vocational Education Council.

Some bodies are required by statute to submit annual accounts to the Secretary of State who is obliged to pass them to the Comptroller and Auditor General. He is then obliged to lay copies of them before Parliament. These bodies are:

Accounts Commission for Scotland

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland

National Library of Scotland

National Galleries of Scotland

National Museums of Scotland

New Town Development Corporations

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Scottish Enterprise

Scottish Examination Board

Scottish Higher Education Funding Council

Scottish Homes

Scottish Legal Aid Board

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Tourist Board.

The Scottish Sports Council makes its accounts available on a voluntary basis.

No executive NDPB sponsored by my Department is required to publish the minutes of its meetings on a statutory basis. Livingston development corporation voluntarily makes available for public inspection the minutes of those parts of its meetings which it opens to members of the public.

No executive NDPB sponsored by my Department is required to publish the agenda of its meetings and none does so.

Information about members' interests is available from Companies House in relation to executive NDPBs which are covered by the Companies Acts and the Friendly Societies Acts. These bodies are:

Hannah Research Institute

Macaulay Land Use Research Institute

Moredun Research Institute

Scottish Crop Research Institute

Scottish Council for Educational Technology

Scottish Vocational Education Council.

Although registers of members' interests are held by a number of other executive NDPBs none is required to publish them. The National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland and Scottish Homes voluntarily publish a register of members' interests. The Scottish Legal Aid Board will be publishing a register in its annual report, which will be available about July. Some other bodies hold registers which are, or will be during the course of this year, available for inspection at the offices of the body. These are: Highlands and Islands Enterprise—financial decisions relating to registered interests are published in the annual report; National Museums of Scotland—available from August 1996; Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Enterprise—summary available at time of annual report and financial transactions involving board members published in annual report and accounts; Scottish Film Council and Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

Holyroodhouse

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by job title and salary the staff of the palace of Holyroodhouse. [17899]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* The staff of the palace of Holyroodhouse paid for by Historic Scotland are:

Post	*Salary £*
Head of security	16,023
16 security officers	[1]12,836
3 craftsmen	[1]15,386
2.5 porters	[1]8,624

[1] Average.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply of 13 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *566*, if he will give details of the professional and central administration costs connected with the palace of Holyroodhouse in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95. [17977]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* Administrative and professional input to the conservation and maintenance of the palace forms only a part of the duties for a wide range of staff. Records are not collated in a manner which allows the specific palace costs to be extracted without incurring disproportionate costs.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people visited the palace of Holyroodhouse in each of the last three years; and what income was derived from visitors. [17901]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* The Number of visitors to the palace of Holyroodhouse and the income derived from them in each of the last three years was as follows:

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Number of visitors	276,866	299,722	253,714
	£'000s	*£'000s*	*£'000s*
Operating profit	307	358	340
Central costs	(59)	(56)	(92)
Curatorial expenditure	(41)	(47)	(49)
Net visitor income	297	255	199

Red Deer (Culling)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what monitoring he has undertaken of the culling methods of red deer on the Balmoral and Dalnadamph estates. [17900]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* The Red Deer Commission provides advice to land owners and their representatives in Scotland on deer matters and the Commission has been involved in discussions from time to time in connection with the Balmoral and Dalnadamph estates. In addition, the Deer (Scotland) Act 1959 prescribes the permitted methods for culling red deer in Scotland.

Experimental Nuclear Reactor Sites

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on land ownership and lease arrangements applying to the experimental nuclear reactor sites operated by the Scottish universities research and reactor centre at the former national engineering laboratory in East Kilbride. [18065]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* Ownership of the site of the former National Engineering Laboratory at East Kilbride now rests with Scottish Enterprise. The lease arrangements which apply to that site are an operational matter for that organisation. I will ask the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

European Social Fund

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the funding contribution *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of total funding from the European social fund to each local enterprise company for the (i) youth training, (ii) youth credits, (iii) modern apprenticeships and (iv) training for work programmes. [18745]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Drug-related Deaths

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many heroin-related deaths have occurred in each of the past five years in Wales; and if he will make a statement; [17529]

(2) how many deaths have occurred in Wales in each of the past five years as a result of Ecstasy use; and if he will make a statement; [17515]

(3) how many deaths have occurred in Wales in each of the past five years as a result of LSD use; and if he will make a statement. [17557]

Mr. Richards: The table, provided by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys from information on death certificates, shows the number of deaths to residents of Wales registered between 1990 and 1994 with mention of heroin, Ecstasy and LSD.

	Heroin	*Ecstasy*	*LSD*
1990	0	0	0
1991	1	0	0
1992	3	0	0
1993	0	0	0
1994	1	2	0

Investors in People

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employers, and of what size, hold investor in people status; and what percentage of all employers of that size these constitute *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in Mid Glamorgan [17931]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office's records show that, in Wales, 142 organisations employing fewer than 200 people and 54 organisations with 200 employees or more have achieved the investors in people standard. The equivalent figures for Mid Glamorgan are 24 and 13 organisations respectively.

These achievements represent 18 per cent. of eligible organisations in Wales employing 200 or more people and almost 20 per cent. in Mid Glamorgan. Percentage figures for those with fewer than 200 employees are not yet available.

Sea Empress Incident

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he will take to compensate the local seafood sector following the tanker disaster in Milford Haven; and if he will make a statement. [17597]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the oral statement made by my right hon. Friend on 29 February 1996, column 1024–98.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the loss of life among each species of wild bird for the spillage from the Sea Empress; what support he is providing for those agencies seeking to save the bird populations; and if he will make a statement; [17938]

Mr. Jones: The latest estimate—28 February—on bird kills and birds oiled, by species is given on the following list. Compensation for cost incurred as a result of the oil pollution damage from the Sea Empress is available from the shipowners insurer and from the International oil pollution compensation fund, which is funded by levies on the oil industry.

Sea Empress spillage

Total oiled birds to date (1 March 1996)

Species	*Dead total*	*RSPCA rescued*
Manx Shearwater	1	0
Fulmar	1	0
Great Northern Diver	4	4
Black Throated Diver	1	1
Red Throated Diver	8	35
Little Grebe	0	0
Great Crested Grebe	2	1
Red necked Grebe	0	4
Slavonian Grebe	0	0
Shag	1	10
Cormorant	27	0
Grey Heron	0	0
Little Egret	0	0
Mute Swan	0	9

Sea Empress spillage

Total oiled birds to date (1 March 1996)

Species	*Dead total*	*RSPCA rescued*
Canada Goose	0	0
Shelduck	1	0
Scoter	1,202	2,452
Velvet Scoter	0	1
Eider	0	9
R–B Merganser	0	1
Oystercatcher	6	3
Turnstone	2	0
Black–H Gull	2	1
Common Gull	1	0
Lesser B–B Gull	0	0
Herring Gull	2	7
Great B–B Gull	0	0
Kittiwake	2	2
Guillemot	643	418
Razorbill	160	21
Unidentified	142	0
Total	2,208	2,979

Notes:

These are minimum figures as the complete data set is not yet available. There may also be birds which have been picked up and cared for my members of the public, or taken to other bird hospitals which are not included in the RSPCA figures.

Many dead birds will remain at sea, or come ashore in inaccessible places, and not be counted.

Caution should also be noted with regard to the identification of oiled birds.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional financial assistance he will make available to maritime local authorities in Wales to enable them to minimize the pollution impact of the Sea Empress disaster. [17885]

Mr. Hague: While local authorities are responsible for the clean-up of any oil which comes ashore, the clear principle is that the polluter must pay. The costs will be reimbursed by the ship's insurers and by the International oil pollution compensation fund. In the intervening period, as I said on 29 February *Official Report*, column *1033*, the Welsh Office will consider sympathetically any representations from local authorities about covering costs incurred.

South-East Wales Ambulance Trust

Mr Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what severance payments have been made to the former chief executive of the South-east Wales ambulance trust. [18080]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) on 28 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *603–04*.

Higher Education Inquiry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what involvement his Department will have in the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education; and if he will make a statement. [18450]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend will be fully involved in deciding on the composition of the committee, and on its terms of reference. The Welsh Office will ensure that the committee is fully appraised of the features of the higher education sector in Wales. It will be for the committee to decide on its methods of proceeding but the Welsh Office will be involved in presenting evidence and information to the committee. In due course, my right hon. Friend will be involved in deciding on the Government's response to the committee's report.

German and French Companies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by *(a)* German and *(b)* French companies in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [18266]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: French-owned manufacturing companies employ 4,620 people in Wales and German-owned manufacturing companies in Wales employ 5,630 people in Wales. They make a valuable contribution to the Welsh industrial base.

Wind Farms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received since 1990 *(a)* for and *(b)* against proposals for wind farm developments in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [18268]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Since 1990, my right hon. Friend has received numerous representations about proposals for wind farm developments. The majority of representations have been against the proposals.

Teachers' Pay Award

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the impact of the teachers' pay award on class sizes; and if he will make a statement. [18449]

Mr. Richards: Class sizes will depend upon decisions taken by local education authorities about the allocation of funding, the decisions taken by schools about the deployment of resources and by parents choosing the school they wish their child to attend. If local authorities decide to give priority to schools, we see no reason why class sizes should rise on average.

Bala-Dolgellau Main Road

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received during the past two years on the Bryncoedifor section of the Bala-Dolgellau main road. [18620]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There has been one item of ministerial correspondence and 10 letters from the public addressed to the Highways Directorate about the temporary traffic lights near Drws y Nant on the A494 trunk road.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when work will commence on the Bryncoedifor section of the Bala to Dolgellau main road; and if he will make a statement. [18609]

Mr. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 January 1996, column *297*. The Drws y Nant

improvement on the A494 trunk road is programmed to start in 1997, subject to the satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures and the availability of finance.

New Patients

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many NHS family doctor practices have accepted new NHS patients in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement; [18820]

(2) how many dental practices in Wales have accepted new NHS patients in each year since 1993; and if he will make a statement. [18658]

Mr. Richards: The information is not available centrally.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients were registered with NHS dental practices in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1995, showing this as a percentage of the population of Wales. [18659]

Mr. Richards: Information on the number of patients registered with general dental practitioners in Wales was collected centrally—by the Dental Practice Board—for the first time at the end of 1990. However, as it took some time for patients to register, meaningful data were not available until 1991. The available information is given in the following table:

	Number of patients registered	*Percentage of population*
30 September 1991	1,229,875	43
30 September 1995[1]	1,622,426	56

[1] 1994 population figure has been used to calculate the percentage as 1995 data is not yet available.

Eye Tests

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS eye tests were given in Wales in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [18805]

Mr. Richards: Information on sight tests paid for by family health services authorities during the period in question is given in the following table:

	Number of NHS sight tests
1991–92	332,240
1993–94	397,310
1994–95	420,900

GP Practice Charters

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of family doctor practices in Wales at present produce their own charters; and if he will make a statement. [18804]

Mr. Richards: As at December 1995, 59 per cent. of GP practices in Wales had practice charters.

Rhondda Healthcare Trust

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has received from the Rhondda Healthcare NHS trust during the past year; and if he will make a statement. [18619]

Mr. Richards: Routine discussions between my Department and the Rhondda Healthcare NHS trust have taken place during the normal course of business. I have received one formal representation in response to the consultation on the formation of the North Glamorgan NHS trust.

Charter Mark

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS Wales organisations were awarded the charter mark for outstanding service in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995, and if he will make a statement. [18806]

Mr. Richards: The information is as follows:

	Number of awards to NHS Wales
1993	3
1994	1
1995	7

Schoolchildren (Exclusions)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schoolchildren were excluded *(a)* permanently and *(b)* temporarily from (i) junior and (ii) secondary schools in Wales in (1) 1993, (2) 1994 and (3) 1995; and if he will make a statement. [18818]

Mr. Richards: Information on pupil exclusions has not been collected centrally in the past. Returns to the January 1996 schools census, which asked how many boys and girls were excluded in the 1994–95 academic year, will provide information in due course and supplementary data have also been sought recently from local education authorities.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which applications from schools for grant-maintained status are being considered. [18922]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend is currently considering an application for grant-maintained status from St. Brigid's independent school, Denbigh, Clwyd.

Special Education, Flintshire

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional funds he will make available to assist special educational needs in infant and primary schools in the new Flintshire county council. [18915]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend's final decisions on the Welsh local government revenue settlement for 1996–97 were approved by Parliament on 8 February. It is for individual local authorities to determine how the resources that are made available are allocated between services, including education, in the light of their statutory responsibilities and their perception of local needs and priorities.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18638]

Mr. Hague: This information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Overseas Voters

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people living overseas applied to be registered to vote in the general election of 1992 in each of the Welsh parliamentary constituencies; and if he will make a statement. [18618]

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

Information on numbers of overseas applicants is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the numbers of overseas electors by constituency on the 1992 election register is given in table 1.4 of "Electoral Statistics 1993" (Series EL no. 20), a copy of which is in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Christmas Bonus

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the reasons for the low outturn of payments of the non-contributory pensioners' Christmas bonus in 1994–95. [17803]

Mr. Heald: The estimates for non-contributory Christmas bonus were based on previous projections of the demographic and case load data. The forecasts proved to be too high, resulting in an underspend against provision. However, the outturn for contributory Christmas bonus was greater than forecast, with the result that total out-turn on contributory and non-contributory Christmas bonus was in excess of forecast.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many written parliamentary questions were passed for answer to executive agencies and non-governmental departments in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14985]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table:

Session	*Written answers provided by agency chief executives*
1992–93	495
1993–94	442
1994–95	389
1995–96 to date	155

Note:
Written parliamentary questions concerning matters which have been delegated to the chief executive of an executive agency in its framework document, normally receive a reply from the Minister to the effect that he or she has asked the chief executive to reply direct to the Member by letter.
Source:
Departmental archive of written answers; figures were obtained by a clerical count and may be subject to error.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 30 January concerning a constituent. [17440]

Mr. Roger Evans: A reply was issued on 23 February.

Contributions and Benefits Agencies

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* contributions and *(b)* benefit agencies there have been in Scotland in each of the past 10 years; and how many are located in rural districts. [17105]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables:

Contributions Agency

Year ended	*Locations*
1990	63 (including 20 rural)
1991	55 (including 18 rural)
1992	39 (including 17 rural)
1993	38 (including 17 rural)
1994	32 (including 17 rural)
1995	26 (including 17 rural)

The Contributions Agency was established in April 1990.

Benefits Agency

Year ended	*Locations*
1991	99 (including 34 rural)
1992	100 (including 34 rural)
1993	101 (including 34 rural)
1994	99 (including 32 rural)
1995	97 (including 30 rural)

The Benefits Agency was established in April 1991.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of staff working for *(a)* benefits agencies and *(b)* contributions agencies in Scotland for each year since 1993. [17108]

Mr. Evans: This information is set out in the table.

Staff	1 January 1993		1 January 1994		1 January 1995		1 January 1996	
	BA	CA	BA	CA	BA	CA	BA	CA
Permanent	5,755	324	5,940	329	6,336	290	6,610	219
Casuals	239	0	281	0	351	2	354	26
Total	5,994	324	6,221	329	6,687	292	6,964	245

Notes:
BA = Benefits Agency.
BA = Contributions Agency.
Source: Personnel Data from each Agency.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from the Industrial Injuries advisory council on the draft regulations on reduced earnings allowance. [18275]

Mr. Roger Evans: The council was content with the substance of the draft regulations, but suggested an amendment to the wording of the prescription for carpal tunnel syndrome and a delay in implementation of the provisions limiting to 12 months the backdating of new awards of reduced earnings allowance. A copy of the council chairman's letter and my response have been placed in the Library. The regulations have now been laid before Parliament as the Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1996.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are *(a)* the total costs of administering the cold weather payment scheme and *(b)* the annual value of the contract with Meteorological Office for forecasting in respect of the scheme; and what proportion of the total budget for the scheme each of these sums represented in 1994–95. [18301]

Mr. Roger Evans: A detailed breakdown of the administration costs of the cold weather payment scheme is not available. Payments are issued automatically, so, administration costs are comparatively low.

The cost of the cold weather payment scheme is dependent on weather conditions in any particular year. During the mild winter of 1994–95, 10,969 payments were made at a total cost of £76,786. Administration costs were therefore minimal.

Out of a total of £15,806 charged by the Meteorological Office for the cold weather payment scheme during 1994–95, £7,755 was for forecasting. These costs are negotiated annually and are fixed costs regardless of actual weather conditions.

As a breakdown of the total budget for the scheme, including administration, is unavailable, it is not possible to say what proportion of the total the charge for forecasting represents.

Note:
1. This figure will not sum as a multiple of the 1994–95 £7 cold weather payment figure, due to clerical awards made at amounts other than £7.

Retirement Pensions and Income Support

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage by which the state retirement pension and income support were uprated in April 1995 and will be uprated in April 1996; and if he will provide figures on *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the percentage that the applicable amount for income support for a single pensioner aged under 75 years has changed relative to the level of the state retirement pension. [18337]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

	Percentage by which retirement pension uprated (Column A)	Percentage by which income support uprated (Column B)	Amount by which retirement pension increased (Column C)	Amount by which income support increased (Column D)	Column D as a percentage of column C (Column E)
1995	2.2	1.8	£1.25	£1.15	92 per cent.
1996	3.9	3.0	£2.30	£1.95	85 per cent.

1. Amounts are for a single pensioner aged under 75 who is not disabled.
2. Figures in column E are to the nearest whole number.

Hearing Loss

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will meet representatives of the Royal British Legion to discuss the effects on the ex-service community of the abolition of lump sum payments for attributable hearing loss below 20 per cent.; [18952]

(2) if he will meet representatives of the Royal British Legion to discuss the effects for the ex-service community of the abolition of lump sum payments for attributable hearing loss below 20 per cent. [18954]

Mr. Heald: The removal of payment of gratuities for service-attributable noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss of less than 20 per cent. was part of a package of measures which included an increase from April 1993 of up to £5 a week above the rate of inflation for all war disablement pensioners. The most severely disabled gained most. Almost 265,000 war pensioners are now gaining from this increase at an estimated annual cost of over £26 million. The package was therefore of considerable benefit to the disabled ex-service community.

This matter has been discussed on several occasions at meetings between Ministers and representatives of ex-service organisations, including the Royal British Legion. I see no point in a further meeting at this time.

Social Fund (Southampton)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of *(a)* social fund grants and *(b)* social fund loans which were (i) claimed and (ii) granted in each year since 1989 in the area covered by Benefits Agency offices serving Southampton; and what was the expenditure in each year on each benefit. [18844]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Denham, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what was the total number of *(a)* Social Fund grants and *(b)* Social Fund loans which were (i) claimed and (ii) granted in each year since 1989 in the area covered by Benefits Agency offices serving Southampton; and what was the expenditure in each year on each benefit.

The information requested is not available for the financial year 1989–90.

When the Benefits Agency was formed in April 1991, existing Local Offices were grouped into Districts. Annex A gives the figures for the Southampton Local Office prior to the change. Southampton Office forms part of Solent and New Forest District, which also includes the Fareham and New Forest Branch Offices. Annex B, gives the figures for Solent and New Forest District from April 1991 to date. Figures are only available for the District as a whole.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A: Number of applications, awards and expenditure in Southampton office

April 1990—March 1991

Type	*Applications*	*Awards*	*Expenditure (£)*
Loans	6,999	4,531	535,698
Grants	2,312	934	209,817

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Annex B: Number of applications, awards and expenditure in Solent and New Forest District

April 1991–January 1996

Type	*Applications*	*Awards*	*Expenditure £*
1991			
Loans	14,200	9,767	1,315,691
Grants	6,742	1,927	475,818
1992			
Loans	16,256	11,671	1,603,254
Grants	7,838	2,210	509,998
1993			
Loans	16,153	11,932	1,839,088
Grants	7,807	1,939	507,242
1994			
Loans	17,431	11,160	2,079,101
Grants	11,642	1,846	547,542

Annex B: Number of applications, awards and expenditure in Solent and New Forest District

April 1991–January 1996

Type	*Applications*	*Awards*	*Expenditure £*
1995			
Loans	12,988	9,504	1,896,291
Grants	6,215	1,363	445,735

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Family Credit, Southampton

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of households claiming family credit in each year since 1989, in the area covered by Benefits Agency offices serving Southampton; and what was the expenditure in each year in current prices. [18843]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Denham, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what was the total number of households claiming Family Credit (FC) in each year since 1989, in the area covered by Benefits Agency (BA) offices serving Southampton; and what was the expenditure in each year in current prices.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because the FC computer system holds records of the total number of claims received, awarded and disallowed on a national basis. Details are not broken down into individual towns or areas. The information is only available from 1993 as details relating to FC claims are normally destroyed after 18 months.

However, statistics are available which indicate the number of families in receipt of FC within a BA office area at a particular date. Unfortunately, the scan does not identify at what stage of the 26 weeks entitlement the awards are at that date. The statistics available for the Southampton Branch Office are as follows. They are provisional and subject to change.

Date of scan	*Families in receipt of family credit at that date*
20 August 1993	1,966
15 April 1994	2,051
10 November 1994	2,224
13 April 1995	2,292
10 November 1995	2,462
16 February 1996	2,534

Details of benefit expenditure is only available on a national basis.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Benefits, Southampton

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of households in receipt of benefits in the area covered by Benefits Agency offices serving Southampton in each year since 1989. [18845]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Denham, dated 5 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what estimate he has made of the number of households in receipt of benefits in the area covered by Benefits Agency (BA) offices serving Southampton in each year since 1989.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because statistics are collected on the number of benefit recipients and not by household. Information relating to centrally administered benefits such as Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Disability Working Allowance, Family Credit, Invalid Care Allowance and Retirement Pension are only collated on a National basis.

Annex A gives details of the number of benefit recipients whose claims are administered by the BA Solent and New Forest District. The District consists of the Southampton, Fareham and New Forest Branch Offices. It should be noted that customers may receive more than one benefit. The information is only available from 1991 when the BA was formed.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Solent and New Forest District
Number and types of benefit recipients from November 1991 to November 1995

	November				
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Income Support	44,283	51,394	52,053	50,322	49,577
Sickness Benefit	3,515	3,853	3,609	4,385	—
Short term Incapacity Benefit	—	—	—	—	1,750
Invalidity Benefit	8,253	9,329	10,342	11,011	—
Long term Incapacity Benefit	—	—	—	—	10,651
Maternity Allowance	205	210	154	167	180
Severe Disability Allowance	2,729	2,795	2,897	3,057	3,065

Sickness Benefit figures include customers who claimed but were not awarded Sickness Benefit as they had paid insufficient National Insurance contributions, but were awarded National Insurance credits only.
Sickness Benefit was replaced by short term Incapacity Benefit from April 1995.
Invalidity Benefit was replaced by long term Incapacity Benefit from April 1995.
Information has been provided by the BA's Central Data Unit, the data is provisional and may be subject to change.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for further consultations on the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [19625]

Mr. Burt: I am pleased to announce a joint consultation exercise that begins today on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

The Government will phase in the access rights in part III of the Act. Around the end of 1996, we will make it unlawful to refuse service, or offer it to a lower standard, or on less favourable terms, simply because someone is disabled. At the same time, we will prohibit discrimination against disabled people by those selling or renting property.

We are consulting on proposals to regulate how these initial rights will operate in certain areas—insurance, services ancillary to education, and agents appointed to act on behalf of those unable to give an informed consent.

At the same time the National Disability Council is consulting on its proposals for a code of practice on these initial rights.

The remaining rights in part III require service providers to make reasonable adjustments to allow or facilitate access for disabled people. The Government are also consulting on the timetable for bringing these duties into force.

Copies of the consultation package are available in the Library.

HEALTH

Casualty Departments

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of casualty departments by region in each of the five years up to 1993–94. [18072]

Mr. Horam: The latest available figures are shown in the table. Information is collected on the basis of trusts and directly managed units with accident and emergency services. Some trusts include more than one hospital each with its own accident and emergency department.

Figures for 1989–90 and 1990–91 are not available centrally.

Trusts and directly managed units[1] with accident and emergency department[2] by region in England

Region	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Northern	20	19	16
Yorkshire	18	17	17
Trent	15	18	14
East Anglian	10	9	10
North-west Thames	17	13	15
North-east Thames	17	16	16
South-east Thames	17	15	16
South-west Thames	15	14	15
Wessex	15	14	12
Oxford	11	8	10
South Western	15	12	15
West Midlands	26	27	27
Mersey	12	11	12
North Western	26	29	20
SHAs	4	4	3
Total	238	226	228

Notes:
[1] A trust or directly managed unit may consist of a number of hospitals each with its own accident and emergency department.
[2] With medical staff on site and where the intention is to open 168 hours per week.
Source:
KHO3 returns.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what time limits have been placed on the period of service contracts entered into with those providing hospital buildings under the private finance initiative. [18825]

Mr. Horam: The period of service contracts entered into with those providing hospital buildings under the private finance initiative is a subject for negotiation between national health service trusts and their potential private sector partners, and will vary from contract to

contract and from service to service. The two criteria for approval of NHS private finance initiative contracts are that they should offer best value for money and that they should reduce risks for the NHS by transferring risks to the private sector.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals are currently seeking PFI contracts in England; what estimate he has made of the number of contracts which will have been signed by 30 March *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997; and if he will make a statement. [19230]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available centrally.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on PFI contracts in *(a)* Amersham and High Wycombe, South Buckinghamshire NHS trust, *(b)* Swindon and *(c)* North Durham. [19229]

Mr. Horam: No. Contracts are currently being negotiated between the trusts and their private sector partners. These are commercially sensitive and confidential.

Solihull Hospital

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will refer the determination of the future of Solihull hospital to an independent tribunal; and if he will make a statement; [18779]

(2) if he will meet a delegation from the parliamentary constituency of Meriden to discuss the future of Solihull hospital as a stand-alone trust hospital. [18783]

Mr. Horam: The proposal to establish Solihull district general hospital as a national health service trust has already been considered thoroughly and rejected. The proposal to dissolve Birmingham Heartlands NHS trust and to establish a new NHS trust with Solihull hospital is still a matter for public consultation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make his decision about the future of Solihull hospital after careful consideration of the outcome of consultation, taking into account all the views expressed. I am, of course, willing to meet my hon. Friend and a delegation from his constituency and to listen to their views.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of whether Solihull hospital could provide accident and emergency facilities on a 24-hour basis with full consultant, medical and support facilities if the hospital merged with Birmingham Heartlands hospital. [18781]

Mr. Horam: This issue is being considered as part of the consultation exercise currently under way on the proposal to merge Solihull district general hospital and Birmingham Heartlands NHS trust.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will postpone the final date of the consultation period on the proposals for the future of Solihull hospital to allow fresh proposals to be considered. [18780]

Mr. Horam: No. If my hon. Friend has any comments to make in response to the consultation exercise I would ask that he forward these to the West Midlands regional health authority as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received during the independent consulting period about the role of Heartlands hospital in Birmingham in respect of the proposed merger with Solihull hospital. [18778]

Mr. Horam: All representations about the proposed merger between Solihull district general hospital and Birmingham Heartlands National Health Service trust have been referred to the West Midlands regional health authority, which is conducting the public consultation exercise on this proposal. Once the exercise is concluded, the regional health authority will report the results to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and we will give careful consideration to the views expressed.

Redundant Hospital Buildings

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the cost of maintaining redundant or empty hospital buildings *(a)* in the United Kingdom, *(b)* in London and *(c)* on the site of the former Westminster hospital; [18851]

(2) how many square feet of former hospital buildings remain *(a)* empty, *(b)* derelict and *(c)* unsold. [18852]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Dentists and Pharmacists (Premises)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been allocated by the NHS executive in each region for funding the improvement of premises occupied by *(a)* dentists and *(b)* pharmacists. [18776]

Mr. Malone: Dentists and pharmacists are independent contractors who make their own business decisions about any improvements that may be necessary for their premises. Their national health service fees cover remuneration and expenses.

Northern and Yorkshire Outpost Headquarters

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 February, *Official Report*, columns *919–20*, if the Yorkshire regional health authority's building at Park parade, Harrogate was *(a)* placed on the open market and *(b)* advertised for sale on the basis of competitive tenders before its sale; who provided an independent valuation of the building for the NHS before its sale; what the valuation was; and on what basis this figure was calculated. [18829]

Mr. Malone: The sale of the former Yorkshire regional health authority building at Park parade, Harrogate was linked to the procurement of new premises for the NHS Executive Northern and Yorkshire regional office, in Durham. This was to avoid the serious risk, confirmed by independent property experts, that the Harrogate offices might remain as a liability to the health service, unsold and unlet for a considerable period.

The linked sale and procurement was put to competitive tender, and the tender was let to Dysart Developments Ltd. on the basis of the best financial return to the health service.

The building was valued prior to tender by the district valuer, at £2.5 million, on the basis of his appraisal of the property and his knowledge of the local market. The successful tender incorporated an offer for the Harrogate building in excess of this figure, at £2.825 million.

Hospital Doctors

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of *(a)* junior and *(b)* other hospital doctors in (i) 1985, (ii) 1990 and (iii) 1995. [18740]

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table. Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

Total numbers of junior doctors and other hospital doctors in England

As at 30 September

Year	*1985*	*1990*	*1994*
Junior doctors	21,520	23,630	25,780
Other hospital doctors	22,030	24,970	26,260

Public Health Link

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the review of the public health link procedure; and if he will publish his conclusions. [18788]

Mr. Horam: The Chief Medical Officer has recently met leaders of the medical profession to discuss how arrangements for transmitting urgent communications to doctors should be improved. Based on the principles agreed, finalised proposals will shortly be put to the medical profession and to other interested parties to ensure procedures are understood by all concerned.

Anaesthetists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of qualified anaesthetists in the NHS; and what is the shortfall for each NHS trust. [18775]

Mr. Malone: The number of qualified anaesthetists—consultant grade—employed in the national health service was 2,350[1] as of 30 September 1994. The Department does not hold information about vacancies at trust level.

Note:

[1] This number is rounded to the nearest 10.

Transplant Surgery

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what examinations, and of what nature, his Department *(a)* has conducted *(b)* is conducting and *(c)* has asked other organisations to conduct into the use for transplantation or other surgical procedures on humans of transgenic or genetically-modified animals or organs or parts therefrom. [18802]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has asked a committee chaired by Professor Ian Kennedy to review the acceptability of, and ethical framework within which, xenotransplantation—the transplant of animal organs, cells and tissue across species—may be undertaken, and to make recommendations. The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens is considering the potential infection risks which might arise following xenotransplantation.

Information Technology

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of planned savings in management costs which will result from more effective use of information technology. [18786]

Mr. Horam: Information technology pervades most of the activity of the national health service. Whilst benefits, including potential savings in management costs, are known for the use of information technology in some of these activities, the Department of Health does not maintain a total across all of them.

Research

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all Department of Health funded pilots, trials and research studies which have been conducted since 1990 in *(a)* Doncaster, *(b)* Mexborough, *(c)* Doncaster travel-to-work area and *(d)* Mexborough travel-to-work area identifying (i) title, summary and duration of the pilot or trial, (ii) target population and total number of participants and (iii) whether each pilot, trial or research finding was published and the date of publication; and if he will list all other non-Deaprtment of Health research bodies or organisations involved in each pilot, trial or research scheme. [19089]

Mr. Malone: Research commissioned within the Department's policy research programme is set out in "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions 1994–95" copies of which are available in the Library.

The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Keith Jones, chairman of the Doncaster district health authority, for available information on local health studies.

Patient Information

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish guidance to the NHS on the protection and use of patient information; and if he will make a statement. [19807]

Mr. Horam: We will be issuing guidance to national health service and other interested bodies tomorrow. Copies will be placed in the Library. The guidance will emphasise the legal duty of all NHS bodies and staff to protect patient confidentiality, as well as the importance of informing patients of the essential uses to which personal information, anonymised wherever possible, may be put.

Childhood Cancers

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the funding of the National Radiological Protection Board, NRPB-R276, pages 100 and 109 in respect of the incidence of childhood cancers linked to natural background alpha radiation. [18761]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health and the Scottish Office provide core-funding to the National Radiological Protection Board which covers many areas, including assessment of the risk of childhood cancer from exposure to natural background alpha radiation. The work of the board on this topic as described in NRPB R-276 was resourced by this funding.

Embryo Research

Mr. Morely: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for new legislation on embryo research. [19159]

Mr Horam: There are currently no plans for further legislation.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to identify the donors of embryos for research; and if he will make a statement. [19155]

Mr. Horam: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's code of practice requires all licensed centres to keep records in which the source of gametes and embryos is accurately and securely recorded.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for new measures on frozen embryos when the current five-year holding period ends. [19156]

Mr. Horam: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Statutory Storage Period for Embryos) Regulations 1996 No. 375 were laid before both Houses on 23 February 1996 and will come into force on 1 May 1996.

Human Fertility and Embryo Authority

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring his Department conducts of the operation of the Human Fertility and Embryo Authority. [19158]

Mr. Horam: Under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is required to produce an annual report which is laid before Parliament. Between reports there is regular contact between Ministers, departmental officials and the authority. It is Government policy that all non-departmental public bodies should be reviewed after five years in existence. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 19 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *367*, which announced that a full review by the Department of Health is now in progress.

In Vitro Fertilisation Centres

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often each registered IVF centre is inspected. [19157]

Mr. Horam: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority inspects all licensed in vitro fertilisation centres annually.

Professions Supplementary to Medicine

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he plans to take to ensure that an adequate number of free placements are available within the national health service for those students in training for professions supplementary to medicine who require such placements for clinical practice during their courses. [19216]

Mr. Horam: Responsibility for negotiating clinical placements rests with education providers. National health service organisations were reminded of their obligation to assist education providers to secure sufficient placements in guidance issued in August 1995. Where charging for placements currently exists, it is being phased out.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which bodies within the national health service will have responsibility after 1 April for fulfilling contract obligations entered into by regional health authorities with educational institutions providing training courses for professions supplementary to medicine; [19212]

(2) which bodies within the national health service will have responsibility after 1 April for providing bursaries for students on courses of training for professions supplementary to medicine. [19213]

Mr. Horam: From 1 April 1996 regional offices of the Department of Health will have responsibility for the contracts with education institutions and for the provision of bursaries for students for the professions allied to medicine.

Health Authority Appointments

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the new health authorities indicating their gender and occupation. [19217]

Mr. Malone: A list of all appointments to national health service authorities and trusts will be published in the summer of 1996. This will include both the gender and occupation of appointees.

Meningitis

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases there have been of meningitis (i) A, (ii) B and (iii) C in each of the last five years *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in each EU country. [19225]

Mr. Horam: In the past five years the numbers of cases of meningococcal infection reported in England and Wales, including cases of meningitis and septicaemia, and due to each group of Neisseria meningitidis are as shown in the table.

Isolates of N meningitidis received at the Public Health Laboratory Service's meningococcal reference laboratory 1990–95, England and Wales

Group	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*[1]1995*
A	13	6	7	2	1	0
B	997	959	923	929	789	866
C	466	394	326	319	291	444
Other groups	24	39	45	47	48	64
All groups	1,500	1,398	1,301	1,297	1,129	1,394

[1] provisional data for 1995.

Data for each European Union country is not routinely collated by the Public Health Laboratory Service and may not, in any case, be comparable between different countries because of different reporting systems and differing access to grouping and typing facilities.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which countries in the EU give routine meningitis vaccinations to children. [19226]

Mr. Horam: Eleven of the 15 countries in the European Union give routine Hib vaccine, which protects against cases of meningitis due to Haemophilus influenzae type b infections. Hib vaccine was introduced into the United Kingdom childhood immunisation programme in 1992 and has been a great success. The vaccine has virtually eliminated Hib meningitis in young children.

No countries in the European Union currently give routine vaccination against meningococcal meningitis—that is, cases caused by Neisseria meningitidis.

Public Finance

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the percentage change in each of the last five years of public finance in the NHS capital programme. [19228]

Mr. Horam: The information is shown in the table.

	Hospital and community health services gross capital expenditure (£ million)	*Change (Per cent.)*
1990–91	1,576	9.1
1991–92	1,659	5.3
1992–93	1,815	9.4
1993–94	1,783	-1.8
1994–95	2,049	14.9

South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received on the accountancy error made in calculating the income of the South Manchester University Hospitals NHS trust; what replies he has made; and if he will make a statement on the effects of the error in terms of *(a)* bed closures and *(b)* numbers of people waiting for hospital treatment. [19274]

Mr. Horam: We have received two letters on this subject. The trust has drawn up a recovery plan which involves selective bed closures and estimates that its proposals will add approximately two months to in-patient waiting times for Manchester residents.

Hepatitis B

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual cost of universal vaccination of children against hepatitis B. [19218]

Mr. Horam: At manufacturers' current listed prices, annual vaccine costs for one birth cohort would be in the region of £17 million. The total cost of universal immunisation against hepatitis B will comprise of vaccine costs, the costs of administering the vaccine, and other costs of carrying out the immunisation programme. Costs of administering the vaccine could vary depending on the immunisation programme chosen.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the World Health Organisation's recommendation on hepatitis B vaccination. [19219]

Mr. Horam: Hepatitis B vaccine has been used in this country since 1982 and is currently recommended for those at increased risk of infection. The Department of Health is considering the implications of the World Health Organisation's recommendation for countries such as the United Kingdom, which has one of the lowest prevalence rates of chronic hepatitis B carriers in the world.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cost-effectiveness of universal hepatitis B vaccinations for children. [19220]

Mr. Horam: The cost-effectiveness of universal hepatitis B vaccination for children is dependent on many factors, including the prevalence of hepatitis B infection in the population, the age at which immunisation is offered, the coverage achieved, vaccine efficiency, changes in the risks of exposure to the virus, the cost of the immunisation programme chosen, and the morbidity and mortality prevented as a result of that programme. The Department has commissioned research to develop a mathematical model of hepatitis B transmission dynamics to assist in this work.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into the duration of antibody response in children vaccinated with hepatitis B vaccination. [19221]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has not commissioned research on this subject.

Vaccinations (Cancer Prevention)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relationship between vaccination and cancer prevention. [19222]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has not commissioned from central funds research into the relationship between vaccines and cancer prevention.

However, the Department of Health, Medical Research Centre, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and Glaxo/Wellcome—a leading pharmaceutical company—have jointly set up the Edward Jenner Institute for Vaccine Research, with Professor Peter Beverley as its first scientific head.

The overall research strategy of the institute will be

"to improve understanding of the immune response and apply that knowledge to the development of new vaccines to prevent diseases resulting from infections and malignancies (cancers)."

Chronic Liver Disease

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new diagnoses of chronic liver disease there have been in each of the last five years. [19223]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available.

Methadone

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were prescribed and how many and what percentage of doctors prescribed methadone in each region, district, family health services authority area and nationally in each of the last five years. [19227]

Mr. Malone: Information is not available in the form requested.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 7 March 1996

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mr. Stephan Adolph Kock

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the sponsors of Mr. Stephan Adolph Kock's application for British nationality granted on 20 March 1969. [18976]

Mr. Kirkhope: No. It is not our practice to disclose such details.

Blackmail

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases arrests for attempted blackmail by serious fraud squad detectives did not lead to charges *(a)* in 1994 and *(b)* in 1995. [19356]

Mr. Maclean: I assume the question refers to the Metropolitan police fraud squad. I understand that the figures available to the Metropolitan police do not distinguish arrests by the fraud squad from others and are kept by financial year. Figures for 1994–95 are not available, but so far in financial year 1995–96 there have been three arrests made by the Metropolitan police for attempted blackmail which have not led to charges.

Hong Kong Citizens

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which categories of *(a)* passport holders and *(b)* non-passport holders, settled in Hong Kong prior to 1 July 1997, will be able to apply for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom as dependant relatives; and if he will make a statement. [19473]

Mr. Kirhope: To qualify for indefinite leave to remain as a dependant relative, any person who is subject to immigration control has to meet the requirements of the immigration rules.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what type of British passport ethnic minority people settled in Hong Kong will be eligible to apply; what rights such passports will confer on their holders; and if he will make a statement explaining the arrangements for passport applications. [19475]

Mr. Kirkhope: The ethnic minorities are eligible for the types of British passport which correspond to the citizenship they hold. Those who are successful in British nationality selection are entitled to British citizenship passports with right of abode in the United Kingdom. The majority will be entitled to a British dependent territories citizen—BDTC—passport or its successor, the British national (overseas)—BN(O)—passport. Any BDTC who would otherwise be stateless on 1 July 1997 will automatically become a British overseas citizen—BOC. BDTCs, BN(O)s and BOCs all enjoy visa-free travel to the United Kingdom, an entitlement to registration as a British citizen following settlement and five years' residence here, and British consular protection in appropriate circumstances. Applications in Hong Kong for British passports can be made to the Hong Kong immigration department.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* war service and *(b)* other widows settled in Hong Kong are entitled to British passports; and if he will make a statement. [19472]

Mr. Kirkhope: I understand that, of the 23 widows of men who served in the defence of Hong Kong during the second world war who are resident in Hong Kong 18 are British dependent territories citizens or British nationals (overseas) and are therefore eligible for appropriate British passports. The number of other widows in Hong Kong who are eligible for British passports is not known. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced during his recent visit to Hong Kong that the Government would facilitate a private Member's Bill to give British citizenship to the wives and widows of ex-service men who served in the defence of Hong Kong during the second world war.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement explaining who in Hong Kong will be eligible to visa-free access to the United Kingdom from Hong Kong after 1 July 1997; what endorsement will be made to their passports before they leave Hong Kong; what will be the procedures for obtaining such endorsement; and what period of leave to enter the United Kingdom will such passport holders be granted on entry to the United Kingdom. [19474]

Mr. Kirkhope: Holders of British national (overseas) or Hong Kong (special administrative region) passports after 1 July 1997 will not require a visa to travel to the United Kingdom for a short visit. They will not require specific entry clearance endorsed in their passports except for those purposes for which, under the immigration rules, entry clearance is mandatory. They will, however, need to satisfy the immigration officer at the port of entry that they meet the requirements of the immigration rules. They will be granted leave to enter appropriate to the purpose of their visit.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* heads of households and *(b)* their dependants in Hong Kong have, to date, been issued with British passports; what was the total number of British passports which Her Majesty's Government announced would be issued; what plans he has to issue more British passports to heads of household and dependants; and if he will make a statement. [19476]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 29 February 1996, 48,610 principal beneficiaries and 80,866 dependants had been registered as British citizens under the selection scheme. On Second Reading of the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill, the then Home Secretary estimated

"the absolute maximum number of people who might benefit"

as 225,000 people. The selection scheme is, however, constructed on the basis of principal beneficiaries and the Act limits them to 50,000; there is no discretion to vary that number. It is the family size of the principal beneficiaries that will determine the total number of

beneficiaries, not estimates made in 1990. The Government have no plans to introduce further legislation to amend the scheme.

Crime Statistics

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the *(a)* crime clear-up and *(b)* the conviction rates for each police authority area in each of the last five years. [18958]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested on clear-up rates is published in table 2.11 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1994", a copy of which is available in the Library. Information on conviction rates by police force area is given in the table.

Conviction rates for indictable offences by police force area 1990–94

Percentage

Police force area	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Avon and Somerset	64	63	60	56	57
Bedfordshire	63	60	59	55	59
Cambridgeshire	71	67	67	64	58
Cheshire	78	73	71	73	73
Cleveland	71	64	60	59	61
Cumbria	79	75	73	72	72
Derbyshire	73	67	65	62	61
Devon and Cornwall	82	72	72	69	65
Dorset	73	67	66	69	65
Durham	65	61	61	63	63
Essex	69	62	62	62	60
Gloucestershire	68	67	63	61	63
Greater Manchester	78	77	73	74	66
Hampshire	73	68	69	66	67
Hertfordshire	75	64	59	59	58
Humberside	77	76	74	72	73
Kent	84	87	82	77	77
Lancashire	75	75	77	69	69
Leicestershire	71	67	65	59	56
Lincolnshire	77	69	73	70	74
City of London	67	67	59	66	64
Merseyside	66	64	60	63	59
Metropolitan Police	79	73	70	62	63
Norfolk	84	82	84	83	86
Northamptonshire	67	64	60	59	57
Northumbria	70	65	64	63	60
North Yorkshire	74	68	66	68	68
Nottinghamshire	68	61	61	59	57
South Yorkshire	74	71	67	67	65
Staffordshire	65	65	62	60	60
Suffolk	75	72	68	69	68
Surrey	69	67	62	62	61
Sussex	73	69	69	66	66
Thames Valley	71	65	64	62	59
Warwickshire	82	77	68	66	65
West Mercia	74	74	69	67	65
West Midlands	70	65	59	60	60
West Yorkshire	73	69	63	61	59
Wiltshire	74	71	70	70	68
Dyfed Powys	67	65	62	61	55
Gwent	66	65	67	61	64
North Wales	79	79	66	67	67
South Wales	67	66	61	62	61
England and Wales	73	69	66	64	63

Citizenship Applications

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to revise the fee levels for citizenship applications. [20162]

Mr. Kirkhope: Citizenship fees were last changed in March 1991 and some changes are necessary in order to meet the Government's policy of recovering no more than the cost of processing citizenship applications. New British Nationality (Fees) Regulations 1996 are being laid before Parliament today to introduce the following fee levels with effect from 1 April 1996:

	Present fees £	*New fees* £
Registration (Adult or minor)	85	120
Naturalisation on grounds of marriage to a British citizen	135	120
All other naturalisations	170	150

The fees for applications for naturalisation, which represent about 75 per cent. of all applications, have been reduced significantly. At the same time, the opportunity has been taken to remove the element of cross-subsidisation between applications for registration and naturalisation which has come to light since fee levels were last revised. This has led to an increase in the fee for applicants for registration.

The existing arrangements for joint applicants will be unchanged: husbands and wives applying together for naturalisation will continue to pay one single fee, as will minor children of the same parent applying together for registration.

The practice of returning a nominal amount where an application is subsequently withdrawn or refused has been reviewed. It has become apparent that the difference in the cost of successful and unsuccessful applications is negligible. Unsuccessful applicants who apply on or after 1 April 1996 will therefore pay the full cost of processing their applications and will not receive a refund.

The new regulations will also increase the fees payable to the Home Office for renouncing citizenship and for supplying copy certificates and other documents from £15 to £20. The fee for administering the oath of allegiance which is payable to the person administering the oath will be increased from £3.50 to £5 in order to bring it into line with fees for analogous work under the Commissioners for Oaths (Fees) Order 1993.

It is expected that the revised fee levels will provide sufficient income to meet the costs of processing applications over the period April 1996 to April 1997.

Employment Law

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been of employers for employing persons with no entitlement to work in the United Kingdom in each year from 1988 until 1994. [18238]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 13 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *661*.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Committee on Standards in Public Life

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the review of the legal framework governing accountability and propriety in public bodies and the arrangements for their external audit, undertaken in response to recommendations in the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [20036]

Mr. Freeman: The Government have published a consultation paper, "Spending Public Money: Governance and Audit Issues", Cm 3179, which has been laid in both Houses. The paper covers executive non-departmental public bodies, NHS bodies and local government and, as regards audit arrangements, what the Nolan committee has called local public spending bodies. Comments have been invited to a 14 June deadline.

The proposals on personal accountability include a more consistent way of handling conflicts of interest on the part of board members. Codes of conduct are planned for staff of executive NDPBs and NHS bodies. NDPB and NHS board members will be protected from the costs of personal civil liability on certain conditions. The proposals make it clear that executive NDPB accounting officers, working under their boards, are responsible for propriety in a broad sense, as Nolan recommended. The Government are not persuaded that provisions similar to surcharging in local government should be extended into areas where other sanctions, including the power of dismissal, are available. Further guidance is being provided on openness, taking account of the Nolan committee's standard of best practice as appropriate. Executive NDPBs should make records of decisions available wherever possible, and should publish reports containing at least a summary of their accounts. The Comptroller and Auditor General is encouraged to develop systematic work on comparative performance.

External audit arrangements should support lines of accountability and include an emphasis on regularity and value for money. There should be an element independent of the audited body involved in setting standards, defining audit practice and laying down reporting requirements. Duplication should be avoided. Reports should be addressed outside the audited body on major issues arising from the audit. The Government will ensure that the Comptroller and Auditor General has inspection rights over all executive NDPBs which he does not audit. He has a key role where Parliament has established Ministers' accountability through legislation; elsewhere, other arrangements are likely to provide better support of accountability. The Government accept the Nolan committee's recommendation that the Audit Commission should be able at its own discretion to publish public interest reports on NHS bodies.

Funding bodies should ensure that bodies receiving grants have adequate financial control arrangements. Education and housing funding bodies should as a matter of good practice require external auditors of bodies which they fund to report to them immediately if they find serious financial weakness or irregularity. They should consider ways in which they can draw on the expertise of the national audit agencies on audit arrangements and value-for-money work.

The paper proposes that the audit agencies, acting together, should commission an independent review of the interface between them. The paper gives examples of cases where public bodies audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General should ensure that he has appropriate access to contractors' records. He is invited to consider letting private sector firms compete with NAO audit staff to undertake certain audits, without affecting his statutory position as auditor.

The Government intend to consult further on the most suitable arrangements for the external audit of local authorities and health bodies in Northern Ireland.

The differences between sectors mean that imposing a single, uniform structure would require large-scale changes in their relationships with Parliament, requiring major legislation. The Government believe that the best way forward is to build on, and spread, good practice.

ENVIRONMENT

Wetlands

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his proposals to protect wetlands; if these proposals will include riparian zone protection; and how they will affect agriculture and rural communities. [18603]

Mr. Clappison: As a leading supporter of the Ramsar convention on wetlands of international importance the United Kingdom is committed to protecting wetlands and promoting their wise use. There are numerous mechanisms and initiatives in place to protect UK wetlands, in particular Ramsar listing and the classification of special protection areas under the birds directive, which includes river floodplains and water meadows. The development of catchment management plans and estuary management plans are among other initiatives under way. In addition, the Government intend to propose certain rivers as special areas of conservation under the habitats directive. All these initiatives are pursued in co-operation with landowners and other interested parties.

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19035]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of non-information technology and information technology thefts for the Department for the 1994–95 and 1995–96, to date, financial years, including details of thefts over £25,000, are given in the table. However, the remainder of the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	1994–95		1995–96 (to end February)	
	Number	Value	Number	Value
Non-IT Thefts				
DOE	4	£1,847	4	£868
IT Thefts				
DOE	24	£40,636	11	£44,417

IT Thefts with a Value of Over £5000

1994–95—DOE

(a) £25,000—Theft of computer components from 43 machines in the Government Office East Midlands and the Highways Agency.

1995–96—DOE

(a) £24,000—Theft of computer components from 2 Marsham Street.

1995–96—PH

(a) £17,037—Theft of computer components from St. Christopher House.

Castle Cement

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will use his powers under section 12(5) of the Environmental Protection act 1990 to instruct Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to revoke the authorisation granted to Castle Cement to burn secondary liquid fuel at its Clitheroe cement works. [18930]

Mr. Clappison: No case has been made to the Secretary of State as to why he should do this.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of *(a)* the loss to business and *(b)* the number of redundancies from the reduction in funding to the home energy efficiency scheme. [19265]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The changes to the home energy efficiency scheme will create opportunities for businesses involved in it. Householders aged over 60 who are not on benefit will be entitled to a substantial discount. There is no reason why the number of installations should not be the same as in the previous year if installers market the scheme properly.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation she held with businesses before the decision to reduce Government funding for the home energy efficiency scheme. [19266]

Mr. Jones: Public expenditure decisions are not discussed before the Chancellor's Budget statement to the House.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the level of Government funding of the home energy efficiency scheme in each year since its starting date; and if he will give the figures for 1996–97 and 1997–98, in real terms and as a percentage change from the previous year. [19267]

Mr. Jones: The information requested is as follows. The figures show that funding for the home energy efficiency scheme for the next financial year will be 280 per cent. more than in 1991–92, its first full year of operation. This increase can be matched by few if any other programmes.

Year	Expenditure (£ million)	Percentage change
1990–91[1]	1	n/a
1991–92	26	n/a
1992–93	34	+31
1993–94	42	+24
1994–95	83	+98
1995–96	[2]106	+28
1996–97	[3]73	–31
1997–98	[4]75	+3

[1] From 1 January.
[2] Estimated.
[3] Allocated.
[4] Planned.

Taking 1995–96 as the base year, and taking inflation as 3 per cent., the allocation for 1996–97 and the planned allocation for 1997–98 are equivalent in real terms to £71 million.

Colney Hospital, Norfolk

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to call in the planning application for a new hospital at Colney, South Norfolk. [18381]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 22 February, *Official Report*, column *279*. As the adopted local plan makes specific provision for such a development, it is unlikely that the Secretary of State would wish to intervene.

Thoresby Colliery (Fatal Accident)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the director general of the Health and Safety Executive about the fatal accident at Thoresby colliery, Nottinghamshire, on Monday 4 March; and if he will make a statement. [19517]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. The Health and Safety Executive is conducting a full investigation into the accident.

Council Tax Relief (Wandsworth)

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was *(a)* the total sum, *(b)* the amount paid to the London borough of Wandsworth, *(c)* the percentage of the total paid to the London borough of Wandsworth and *(d)* the amount paid per dwelling in the London borough of Wandsworth, in traditional relief in respect of the council tax in each year from 1993–94 to 1995–96. [19494]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Total amount of transitional relief in England:

1993–94: £378,652,826

1994–95: £111,283,108

1995–96: £27,178,179[1]

(b) Amount of transitional relief paid to London Borough of Wandsworth:

1993–94: £35,984,443

1994–95: £23,594,503

1995–96: £10,100,635[1]

(c) Percentage of total amount of transitional relief paid to London Borough of Wandsworth:

1993–94: 9.5 per cent.

1994–95: 21.2 per cent.

1995–96: 37 per cent.[1]

(d) Average amount paid per chargeable dwelling in London Borough of Wandsworth:

1993–94: £323.75

1994–95: £209.29

1995–96: £89.31

These figures are averages. The actual amount of transitional relief varied according to a household's council tax banding, its composition and its previous liability for community charge.

[1] Information for 1995–96 is provisional and is subject to final grant claims to be made during 1996–97.

TRANSPORT

Central Railway

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if Central Railway plc has applied to him for directions under rule 12 of the Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure) Rules granting waivers from compliance with certain application requirements in respect of the Central Railway project. [20250]

Mr. Watts: Yes. Copies of the applications for rule 12 waiver directions, and of the supporting documentation provided by Central Railway plc, have been placed in the House of Commons Library. Members wishing to make representations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State concerning his decision whether to agree to issue any such directions should write to him by Friday 22 March.

HGV Drivers (Eyesight Tests)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has received from lorry drivers' representatives as to the *(a)* numbers and *(b)* proportion of HGV drivers who will be barred from driving as a result of changes to eye tests from 1 July. [19570]

Mr. Norris: I have recently received suggestions that very large numbers of drivers of large goods and passenger-carrying vehicles will lose their entitlement to drive these vehicles as a result of changes to regulations on eyesight standards. No supporting evidence for such estimates has been provided and in some cases they are clearly based on a misunderstanding of the scope of the changes. The 1994 consultation document on the changes included an estimate, based on analysis of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency records, that about 3,000 drivers would be affected by the proposed changes. This estimate was not challenged in the responses to consultation.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with HGV drivers' representatives concerning changes in eyesight tests. [19569]

Mr. Norris: The consultation document on the proposed changes to the regulations on eyesight requirements issued in October 1994 was sent to a wide range of organisations, including representatives of HGV drivers. None requested discussions at the time.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when new European regulations changing eyesight regulations for HGV drivers were agreed; how the United Kingdom representative voted; and what immediate publicity was undertaken. [19516]

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom voted, in 1991, for adoption of the second EC directive on driving licences, 91/439/EEC, which sets minimum standards for health, driving test and licensing requirements across the EU to underpin road safety and in the interests of free movement of nationals of the member states. The Department subsequently, in October 1994, undertook an extensive consultation specifically on changes to the regulations on eyesight standards. A press notice was issued then as well as last October, when I announced the Government's decision.

Emergency Towing Study Team Report

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, *Official Report*, column *581*, what amendments he has made to the report of the emergency towing study team as originally delivered to him: and if he will make a statement. [18900]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* The report is an internal document, but it will be published and placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The report was amended to remove commercially sensitive information which was provided to the study team in confidence, and material which was outside the terms of reference of the study.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what evidence has been submitted to him since the start of construction of the Newbury bypass on new environmental damage; and if he will make a statement; [19065]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the Newbury bypass since construction began; and if he will publish them with his response; [19066]

(3) what estimates he has made of the effect of completion of the Newbury bypass on *(a)* volumes of traffic on the A34, *(b)* volumes of traffic in Newbury itself and *(c)* journey times of traffic travelling (i) through Newbury and (ii) along the bypass; [19111]

(4) what has been the cost of *(a)* police and *(b)* security at the site of the proposed Newbury bypass since October 1995; and if he will make a statement. [19072]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 7 March 1996:

As you know, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the Newbury Bypass.

The cost of security for the advance works contract incurred so far is £1,182,000. The cost of Policing the work is a matter for the Thames Valley Police force.

You ask for details of the effect of the Bypass on traffic flows on the A34, and on the rest of Newbury. On the A34 itself, the bypass provides substantial relief by allowing longer distance through traffic to avoid the town. The table below shows the benefits the bypass would bring to the A34 Inner Relief Road on which traffic flows would be reduced by about 40%. The figures for the residual local traffic remaining on the A34 after the bypass is open do not allow for the potential additional benefits to be provided by local traffic management measures.

	Without bypass		*With bypass*	
Year	*Low growth*	*High growth*	*Low growth*	*High growth*
2000	57,000	63,000	35,000	39,000
2005	61,000	70,000	38,000	43,000
2010	65,000	78,000	40,000	48,000

Note:
The flows given are Annual Average Daily Traffic for low and high growth.

There would be greater benefits to other sections of the A34 bypassed by the scheme, for example traffic along Tothill Straight will be reduced by up to 75%.

In addition to the general relief provided by the bypass there would be particular benefits from the substantial reductions (typically 65-70%) in heavy lorry traffic (estimated at up to 400 an hour at peak times) using the A34 through the town.

Traffic flows on other major routes through the town would also be affected by the bypass. The change in traffic patterns will of course depend on what traffic management measures are brought forward. For example, on the A343 substantial flow reductions of about 30% are forecast. There would be some increases on routes feeding the bypass, for example flows on the A4 on the west side of the town would increase slightly by up to 5%. However, in overall terms the net effect of the bypass would be to remove substantial volumes of traffic, particularly heavy lorry lorries, from the town.

As part of the traffic appraisal for Newbury Bypass, we have assessed the journey times of traffic travelling through Newbury and on the proposed bypass. The savings in travelling time have also been assessed as part of the economic evaluation of the scheme.

For through traffic using the bypass instead of the existing A34, COBA shows average peak period time savings of 15 minutes when the scheme opens. Currently, at the worst times, delays can be up to and over one hour. In the longer term, the savings would be significantly greater since congestion on the existing road would become much worse without the bypass. A major benefit to industrial and business road users will be the much improved journey time reliability provided by the bypass.

Since site clearance operations began, we have received about 700 written representations against the scheme, mostly from outside the area, and a small number from supporters. We have previously received nearly 20,000 expressions of support for the bypass. It would be inappropriate to publish these letters without the consent of the writers which could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The reply to the recent representations against the scheme has been broadly along the lines of the draft attached.

No evidence of new environmental damage has been submitted although it has been suggested that the Desmoulins' Whorl Snail, a non-priority annex II species in the Habitats Directive, may be present on the route. It has been established that these snails are present elsewhere in the Kennet and Lambourn valleys. We are liaising with English Nature and carrying out further surveys to determine whether the snails are in the area affected by the bypass and if so, what further mitigation measures are necessary.

Aviation Research

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the research projects sponsored by his Deapartment relating to aviation over the last five years. [19084]

Mr. Norris: The research projects relating to aviation undertaken over the last five years in which the Department of Transport has had a financial involvement are as follows:

Safety

Explosion Hazard Research

Signature Identification of Pressure Pulse Research

Helicopter Safety Research

Crash Impact Research

Environmental

Aeronox

Aerotrace

Polinat

Ground Emissions Study

Field Study into Aircraft Noise and Sleep Disturbance

Measurement and Modelling of Helicopter Noise

Social Survey Study of Attitudes to Helicopter Noise

Research into Helicopter Noise Characteristics and Future Trends

Review of Departure Noise Limits at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports

Studies into Ground Noise at Night at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports and Arrival Noise at the same airports

Transport Security

Twenty-five research projects are being or have been carried out in the area of transport security, although not all are exclusive in the aviation field.

Sea Empress

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what requests for assistance have been received by his office in respect of clear-up operations following the Sea Empress disaster. [18356]

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 7 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about clear-up operations following the 'Sea Empress' disaster.

No requests for assistance from bodies outside of the Joint Response Centre have been received by the Marine Pollution Control Unit.

Aircraft (Landing Slots)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list for each major UK airport the number of aircraft taking off without take-off slots, together with the airline name and country of registration for each of the last five years; [19081]

(2) if he will list by each major airport the number of aircraft which arrived without landing slots together with the airline name and country of registration for each of the last five years. [19080]

Mr. Norris: No records are kept for UK airports of the extent of unscheduled take-offs or landings, that is, for which no slot has been obtained in advance. However, an assessment for Heathrow during June 1995 found an average of five unscheduled departures each weekday, in addition to opportunity slots obtained by business and general aviation. Most of the unscheduled movements operated by commercial airlines are maintenance, positioning or testing flights; only a minority, such as diversions from other airports, are passenger carrying.

Gatwick Airport

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many take-off and landing slots are currently occupied by domestic and short-haul services at Gatwick airport. [18662]

Mr. Norris: For the current winter season 64,599 slots at Gatwick airport are at present occupied by services to or from domestic or short-haul destinations.

EU Directives

Sir Richard Body: To as the Secretary of State for Transport how many Community directives were introduced by him to United Kingdom law in 1995. [18293]

Mr. Watts: During 1995, the Secretary of State for Transport introduced 13 statutory instruments, the purpose of which was to implement EC legislation into UK law.

Aircraft (Safety)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the countries from which aircraft are banned by the Federal Aviation Authority from flying into the United States of America and the equivalent Civil Aviation Authority list; [18669]

(2) if he will list by country the number of inspections undertaken by the Civil Aviation Authority on aircraft flying into the United Kingdom; [18670]

(3) if he will list the countries identified as having safety oversight procedure problems by the US Federal Aviation Authority; and how many aircraft registered by those countries entered the UK in each of the last five years; [19079]

(4) how many inspections were undertaken on foreign registered aircraft within the UK and the country of registration in the last five years; and if he will list the defects found during those inspections. [19083]

Mr. Norris: Before granting permission for a non-European Economic Area aircraft to fly to the United Kingdom, we seek confirmation that the aircraft will be operated in accordance with international safety standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. This confirmation is normally in the form of certificates issued by the aviation authorities of the state of registration of the aircraft, stating that the aircraft will be operated in accordance with ICAO safety standards. If there is any doubt about the safe operation of an aircraft, no permit will be issued until we are satisfied about its safety. This may involve asking the Civil Aviation Authority to conduct a physical check of the aircraft concerned.

Since 1993, we have instructed the CAA to carry out checks of aircraft from the following countries:

Country	*Number of checks*
Bulgaria	1
Ghana	2
Nigeria	1
Russia	5
Sweden	2
Tajikstan	1
Turkey	1
Venezuela	1
Yugoslavia	1

In addition, the CAA carries out inspections, without instruction from the Department, on any aircraft that it has reason to believe may be unsafe to fly.

A list of deficiencies uncovered by the physical checks is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to issue a further White Paper on airport policy; and if he will make a statement. [18291]

Mr. Norris: We have no plans to issue a new White Paper on airports policy.

BR Vendor Unit

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the sales completed by the BR vendor unit, with the name of purchaser and price paid in each case. [16228]

Mr. Watts *[pursuant to his answer, 22 February 1996, c. 274]:* The sales completed by the British Rail Board are listed. Those where the BR vendor unit has been involved are marked with an asterisk.

Gross proceeds from the sales to date of businesses sold by BR amount to some £304 million. As explained in the Government's response of 14 December 1995 to the Transport Select Committee fourth report, on railway finances, it would be contrary to the commercial interests of British Rail and the Government to publish details of individual sales at this stage, as that may prejudice similar sales still in progress. Details of individual sales completed will be made public in due course.

In addition to that figure, the sale of the rolling stock leasing companies, which was handled by my Department, realised £1,822.23 million.

BR vendor unit	*Purchaser*
FREIGHT	
Red Star*	Rald Ltd.
Rail Express Systems Ltd.	North and South Railways Ltd.
OTHER BUSINESSES	
Special Train Unit (sale of certain coaches and other assets only)*	Flying Scotsman Railway Ltd.
Meldon Quarry Ltd.*	Camas UK Ltd.
BR Telecommunications Ltd.*	Racal Electronics Ltd.

BR vendor unit	*Purchaser*
OBS Services Ltd.*	The European Rail Catering Company Ltd.
BR Design Offices	
DCU Birmingham*	Owen Williams Ltd.
Mainline Swindon*	Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick
IDG Glasgow*	Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick
BPE Mechanical and Engineering Consultancy, Doncaster*	James Scott Ltd., a member of AMEC plc
Civil Engineering Design Group, York*	British Steel plc
Powertrack Engineering Company Ltd.*	WS Atkins Consultants Ltd.
CEDAC London Ltd.*	WS Atkins Consultants Ltd.
BR Maintenance Ltd.	
Swindon Electronic Service Centre*	ABB Customer Support Ltd.
Chart Leacon (Ashford) Depot (Chart Leacon Rail Maintenance Ltd.)*	ABB Customer Support Ltd.
Ilford Depot (Ilford Rail Maintenance Ltd.)*	ABB Customer Support Ltd.
Doncaster Depot (Doncaster Rail Maintenance Ltd.)*	ABB Customer Support Ltd.
Wolverton Depot (Wolverton Hall Maintenance Ltd.)*	Railcare Ltd.
Springburn (Glasgow) Depot (Glasgow Rail Maintenance Ltd.)*	Railcare Ltd.
Eastleigh Depot (Eastleigh Rail Maintenance Ltd.)*	Wessex Traincare Ltd.
BR Central Services	
Baileyfield Switches and Crossings Works*	VAE Baileyfield Ltd.
Ditton Timber Treatment Works	The Pheonix Timber Group plc
Quality and Safety Services Ltd.	Ingleby (805) Ltd.
Railways Occupational Health Ltd.	Occupational Healthcare plc
Signalling Control (UK) Ltd.	Westinghouse Brake and Signal Holdings Ltd.
Interlogic Control Engineering Ltd.	ABB Daimler-Benz Transportation (Signal) Ltd.
BR Infrastructure Services	
Scotland Track Renewals Company Ltd.	Relayfast Ltd.
Scotland Infrastructure Maintenance Company Ltd.	Track Action Ltd.

* BR vendor unit has been involved.

Railway Incidents

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what incidents have been reported at *(a)* Congleton, *(b)* Wilmslow, *(c)* Litchfield and *(d)* Tamworth over the last 30 years of passengers alighting from a train short of the platform. [19247]

Mr. Watts: The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate has no record since 1984 of any reportable major incidents concerning passengers alighting from trains short of the platforms, at the locations specified. Records before 1984 are no longer available.

Railways (Short Platforms)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those railway stations where platforms are shorter than the length of trains stopping at that platform. [19246]

Mr. Watts: Details of railway stations where platforms are shorter than the length of the trains stopping there are not held centrally.

Railways (Staff Assistance)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the text of the instructions given by *(a)* regional railways and *(b)* North West Railways in respect of assistance to be given by their staff to inter-city staff on board trains travelling through their stations. [19243]

Mr. Watts: This matter is for the train operating companies concerned. I suggest that the hon. Member seeks this information direct from them.

West Coast Main Line Service

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the last 21 days the west coast main line service between Manchester Piccadilly and Euston via Stoke-on-Trent has been *(a)* delayed and *(b)* cancelled as a result of points failure; and what were the date and time of the services affected. [19248]

Mr. Watts: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

SCOTLAND

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [16021]

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested is as follows: *(a)* the Crofters' Commission, new town development corporations, Red Deer Commission, Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Homes, Scottish Legal Aid Board, Scottish Medical Practices Committee, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Sports Council, Scottish tourist board; *(b)* none, as the Audit Commission does not operate in Scotland. The Accounts Commission for Scotland scrutinises the accounts of the seven Scottish river purification boards; *(c)* this information is listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1995", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House; *(d)* none, although all executive NDPBs are expected to comply with all reasonable requests for information from Parliament, users of services and individual citizens; *(e)* performance indicators are part of the management statement or corporate plan for each NDPB; *(f)* the citizens charter applies to all public services, including NDPBs. NDPBs serving the public, including those sponsored by my Department, are therefore expected to meet the charter standards.

National Continence Day

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support he is offering for National Continence Day on 19 March, and what plans he has to improve the incontinence service in Scotland in 1996–97. [16806]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 February 1996]:* The Scottish Office is providing funding for the expansion of a telephone helpline facility at the continence resource centre, Southern general hospital NHS trust, Glasgow, for a four-week period including National Continence Day on 19 March. Leaflets and posters advertising the helpline and encouraging sufferers to seek help have been distributed widely, advertisements will be placed in the local press, and a number of events are being organised across the country by local health service professionals, including continence advisers. In addition, we are working with health boards to encourage them to pursue improvements in incontinence services locally.

Landfill Tax

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the effects the new landfill tax will have on the value of brown-field land; and if he will make a statement. [18278]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has received several representations regarding the possible effect of the landfill tax on remediation schemes for contaminated sites. My right hon. Friend the Paymaster-General has agreed to consider the feasibility of an exemption for waste resulting from the restoration of historically contaminated land.

Holyroodhouse

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who currently holds the position of deputy keeper of the palace of Holyroodhouse and the baille and clerk of the Abbey court; what accommodation within the palace is available to them; and what is the cost to public funds. [17898]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* The position of deputy keeper of the palace of Holyroodhouse is currently held by Lord James Douglas-Hamilton. The position of baille and clerk of the Abbey court is currently held by Mr. Patrick Cadell. No accommodation is provided for them within the palace, they are unpaid and there is no cost to public funds arising from their appointments.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *288*, if he will give details of the accommodation available to the hereditary keeper; what services are provided to him; what duties are undertaken by him; and what is the total cost to public funds arising from the office of hereditary keeper. [17976]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* The accommodation available to the hereditary keeper comprises three reception rooms, two bedrooms and an office. Unless he is occupying the accommodation is connection with his ceremonial duties, the hereditary keeper is required to meet the costs of all services such as heating, lighting and water incurred during periods of occupation. The present hereditary keeper hardly ever occupies the accommodation, which is available for use by the royal household whenever required.

The duties of the hereditary keeper are entirely ceremonial. He receives the Queen and the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland when they visit the palace. There are no costs to public funds arising from the office of hereditary keeper.

Social Housing Rents

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current average gross weekly rent for *(a)* council rented accommodation and *(b)* housing association rented accommodation in Scotland; and what were the figures in 1991. [19166]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 6 March 1996]:* The average unrebated weekly rent for local authority accommodation in Scotland in 1995–96 is estimated to be £28.78. The most recent available information on housing association rented accommodation relates to 1994–95, when the average weekly rent was £29.13. The average local authority rent in 1991–92 was £23.12. Figures for housing association rent in 1991–92 on a comparable basis are not available.

Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if grants made to Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich can be spent within the United Kingdom but outside Scotland; [19118]

(2) what audits have been conducted in respect of grants made to, and other public expenditure provided for, the work of Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich in the past three years; [19119]

(3) what inspections have been conducted of community nurseries promoted or provided by Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich in the past three years; [19120]

(4) what is his Department's responsibility for the grant funding or inspection of the London-based Gaelic medium community nurseries provided by Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich; [19121]

(5) what *(a)* public funds and *(b)* grants are made available to Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich. [19122]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Office grants totalling £61,200 in 1995–96 are made to support the administrative costs associated with Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Araich—the Gaelic Pre-School Council—work in developing Gaelic pre-school groups in Scotland. None of our grants, which are closely monitored and audited annually, are spent outside Scotland. Information on the levels of funding for the individual pre-school groups provided by Government agencies, local authorities, companies, trusts, voluntary organisations, individuals and by the pre-school groups themselves is not held centrally.

The Children Act 1989 empowers local authorities to inspect nursery and day care premises registered under section 71 of the Act. Authorities must exercise that power at least once every year. Registered community

nurseries should, therefore, be inspected at least annually. Information about inspections of particular nurseries is not centrally available.

Prisoners (Transfers)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications for transfer to prisons in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland were made by Irish prisoners in each of the past 10 years; and how many were successful. [18071]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the information which the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service gave to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) in his letter dated Wednesday 28 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *619*.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 March. [17989]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 7 March. [17990]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Far East (Visit)

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his recent visit to the far east. [20056]

The Prime Minister: I attended the inaugural Asia-Europe summit meeting in Bangkok on 29 February to 2 March together with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This summit, for the first time, brought together the leaders of Thailand, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, China, the 15 member states of the European Union and the President of the European Commission. I warmly welcomed the opportunity it offered to reinforce the relations between Europe and East Asia, politically and economically two of the world's three most important regions.

The informal discussions covered a wide range of political and economic issues. The participants agreed on the need to deepen the political dialogue between Asia and Europe, to increase co-operation over arms control, human resource development, environmental protection and the fight against poverty, drugs terrorism and other international crime.

On economic matters, there was common ground over the benefits of strengthening trade and investment flows between Asia and Europe in both direction. The meeting agreed to work for the further liberalisation of trade and for the success of the World Trade Organisation. It also recognised that intensified exchanges of science and technology, especially in sectors such as agriculture, information and technology, energy and transport, were important for extending the economic links between the two regions. Finally, there was agreement on the value of closer people-to-people contacts, especially among younger generations.

The meeting set in hand an ambitious programme of follow-up work, including preparations for the first ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Singapore in December, work on improving conditions for the flow of investment between the two regions, the establishment of a business forum and promotion of reform of the United Nations including the EU initiative on financial reform.

The meeting accepted the United Kingdom's offer to host the second summit which will be held during our presidency of the EU in the first half of 1998. This is a clear signal of our commitment to developing relations with Asia and our determination to play a leading role in the evolving relationship between the two regions.

Hong Kong

During my visit to Hong Kong between 2 and 4 March, I had the opportunity to hear the concerns of a wide range of the Hong Kong community about their future. I was able to reassure them that:

(i) Britain has a long-term commitment to Hong Kong which will last well beyond the transfer of sovereignty on 1 July 1997;

(ii) in the event of a breach of the Sino-British joint declaration, we would pursue every avenue open to us and mobilise the international community;

(iii) holders of the Hong Kong special administrative region passport would not be required to obtain visas for visits to Britain after 30 June 1997;

(iv) we would guarantee admission to Britain for any member of the non-Chinese ethnic minority community with solely British nationality who came under pressure to leave Hong Kong after the transfer of sovereignty; and

(v) we would support a private Member's Bill to grant British citizenship to the wives and widows of the ex-service men from Hong Kong who fought for Britain in the war.

I also had the opportunity to visit several parts of the territory, including the new airport and the extension to the convention and exhibition centre, where development is being pursued to ensure Hong Kong's continuing success.

Korea

Korea is an important trading partner: our exports increased by 44 per cent. in 1995 to more than £1.5 billion, and we have attracted more than 40 per cent. of all Korean inward investment in Europe. The prospects for further growth in these areas are good.

I had a meeting with President Kim Young Sam, our third in 12 months, at which we discussed ways to increase the co-operation between our countries, particularly in trade and investment. I also met the leaders of the major Korean conglomerates. I encouraged them to consider further inward investment here by assuring them of the major benefits of doing so. During my visit, three new Korean investments worth £2.5 million were announced, bringing the number of Korean companies in the UK to 19. Four contracts were signed by British companies for joint ventures valued at £90 million, including a co-operation agreement between British

Nuclear Fuels Ltd. and Hanjung for the building of spent fuel storage casks in a market expected to grow from £35 million to £2 billion.

Princess of Wales

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions or communications Her Majesty's Government have had since the beginning of the current year with the Governments of those other Commonwealth countries whose Head of State is Her Majesty the Queen, about the constitutional future and status of Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales. [18883]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* None.

Duchy of Cornwall (Profits)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if the income and profits of the Duchy of Cornwall are private and personal to the Prince of Wales. [18886]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The capital assets of the Duchy of Cornwall are inalienable, and the income from capital disposals must be reinvested in new capital assets. The Prince of Wales is personally entitled to the net income from the revenue account of the Duchy of Cornwall, from which he meets both public and private expenditure for himself, the Princess and their family.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister at what time or stage on 28 February he was advised that Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales was issuing a statement announcing her intention to divorce His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. [18882]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* I was informed of the statement after it was issued.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what provisions exist for the Princess of Wales to renounce the rank and the title of Her Royal Highness. [18881]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The use of the style lies ultimately in the Queen's gift, although the wishes of the princess would be taken into consideration.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what future funding arrangements from public funds are being made to facilitate HRH the Princess of Wales continuing her public duties subsequent to divorce. [18877]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* Matters relating to the divorce of the Prince and Princess of Wales and the princess's future role are under discussion.

Civil Servants (Conduct)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if it is his policy that civil servants criticised in the Scott report shall be disciplined. [19282]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 March 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, on 6 March, *Official Report,* column 252.

EU Directives

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the EU directives which have been gold plated when transcribed into United Kingdom law in the past five years. [18640]

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy is not to add unnecessary burdens on business when implementing EC directives in the UK. Departments keep existing legislation under review in the light of this policy.

"Questions of Procedure for Ministers"

Dr. Wright: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to issue a revised version of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". [18622]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* I will revise and reissue "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" as and when appropriate.

Civil Servants (Company Directors)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister which serving civil servants in his Department are presently directors of companies; and if he will indicate for each *(a)* the name of the company concerned and *(b)* if annual remuneration was (i) £1 to £5,000, (ii) £5,000 to £10,000 and *(c)* above £10,000. [18146]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* For these purposes, my office forms part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 6 March, *Official Report,* columns *250–51.*

HEALTH

Dental Services

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been deregistered from their dentist since 1992 in each family health services authority area; and if he will make a statement. [17592]

Mr. Malone: This information will be placed in the Library.

GP Fundholders

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he issues to general practitioner fundholders on the appropriate use of savings. [17936]

Mr. Malone: Guidance on the use of fundholder savings is set out in HSG(95)46, copies of which are available in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were, in each of the last five years *(a)* the total losses of fundholders, *(b)* the total savings and *(c)* the total net savings. [17935]

Mr. Malone: Information about fundholder efficiency savings and budget overspends is shown in the table. Figures for 1994–95 are not yet available.

Year	Efficiency savings: £ million	Efficiency savings: Per cent. of budgets set	Budget overspends: £ million	Budget overspends: Per cent. of budgets set
1991–92	15	3.7	2	0.6
1992–93	28	3.5	10	1.2
1993–94	64	3.5	13	0.7

Source: Regional offices.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made in each year of the net worth of general practitioners fundholders' assets. [19499]

Mr. Malone: None. All general practitioners, whether fundholding or not, are independent contractors to the national health service. Information is not therefore available about their assets.

"Patients not Paper"

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and which, health service bodies have so far identified board level members with responsibility for implementing the recommendations of "Patients not Paper"; and what progress has been reported by them. [18795]

Mr. Malone: Each family health services authority in England and Wales has appointed a board level person responsible for implementing the recommendations of "Patients not Paper". In addition, all eight regional offices have appointed a lead individual responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of "Patients not Paper" throughout their region. Good progress towards introducing the recommendations on schedule has been reported from all regions. The key date for introduction of new forms is 1 July 1996.

NHS Medical Staff

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time NHS medical staff in (i) 1993, (ii) 1994 and (iii) 1995. [18803]

Mr. Malone: Information for hospital and community health services doctors is available in "Hospital Medical Staff England Tables" for 1993 and 1994, and from "Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services Medical Staff England Tables" for 1993 and 1994.

Figures for general practitioners are available in "General Medical Services Statistics for England and Wales" 1993 and 1994.

Information for 1995 is not yet available.

Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Continuing Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons salaries are not paid to chairmen of continuing health care review panels. [18821]

Mr. Bowis: It is not normal practice to pay salaries for appointments of this kind, but chairmen are entitled to receive reasonable expenses.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and which, health authorities are intending to use the Barthel index to determine eligibility for NHS continuing in-patient care from April 1996; and what score on the index is being used as the basis for eligibility in respect of each one. [19807]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally; health authority policies and eligibility criteria are currently in the process of being finalised for operation from 1 April.

Tomlinson Report

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons his Department did not implement the recommendation contained in paragraph 42 of the Tomlinson report. [18937]

Mr. Malone: After consultation with the profession, we introduced a package of work force flexibilities in the London initiative zone in September 1995. Together with premises' flexibilities and their general medical services cash-limited allocations, this will enable health authorities and the profession locally to work together to improve services for patients.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals in *(a)* West Yorkshire and *(b)* Leeds are paying private sector hospitals to treat NHS patients; if he will list the hospitals; and what are the costs involved. [18962]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact chairmen of NHS trusts in West Yorkshire for details.

Residential Care

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authorities are applying the same capital asset rules to means testing for domiciliary care and for residential care; and if he will publish a list of those authorities. [18965]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

General Practitioners

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of *(a)* GPs and *(b)* GP vacancies in each health authority area in England. [19256]

Mr. Malone: The available information will be placed in the Library. Information on general practitioner vacancies is not available centrally.

NHS Audits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will hold centrally information on the proportion of NHS audit activity devoted to probity audits; and if he will make a statement. [19347]

Mr. Horam: No. The examination of probity forms one part of the work carried out by internal and external auditors, and cannot readily be quantified.

Whittington Hospital NHS Trust

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *798*, what is the current average time that patients have to wait before being seen when attending the accident and emergency department at the Whittington Hospital NHS trust. [19609]

Mr. Malone: At present, 95 per cent. of patients are seen within five minutes for triage assessment. The average waiting time to see a doctor in January 1996 was 65 minutes. Approximately 45 per cent. of patients were seen by a doctor within 30 minutes, 58 per cent. within 60 minutes, 78 per cent. within 120 minutes and 90 per cent. within 180 minutes. Children and patients needing urgent treatment are always given priority.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the Licensing Authority expects to receive further data on myocardial infarction and third generation oral contraceptives; [19189]

(2) whether data on myocardial infarction risk from third generation oral contraceptives were made available to members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October 1995; and from which studies that data were derived; [19186]

(3) if he will publish the odds ratios relating to myocardial infarction and third generation oral contraceptives which were made available from the World Health Organisation and Spitzer studies to the Medicines Control Agency prior to the meeting of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on 13 October 1995. [19187]

Mr. Malone: Preliminary data on myocardial infarction from the World Health Organisation case control study were made available to the Committee on Safety on Medicines on 13 October 1995. These data remain unpublished and were provided to the Medicines Control Agency in confidence. Limited data on myocardial infarction from the general practice research database were also available to the committee. Further data from the GPRD study and the findings of the transnational study have since become available, and have been published in the medical literature. Further epidemiological data on myocardial infarction are expected, but the time frame for their availability is currently unclear.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial contribution the Licensing Authority made to the costs of distributing the letter dated 26 October 1995 from the Family Planning Association which contained advice on the prescribing of combined oral contraceptives. [19188]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency covered the costs of printing and distribution of the letter to relevant health professionals.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legal proceedings have been instituted against *(a)* the Licensing Authority, *(b)* the Medicines Control Agency, *(c)* Medicines Control Agency staff and *(d)* the Committee on Safety of Medicines in connection with the recent advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines on third generation oral contraceptives. [19192]

Mr. Malone: None.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date Ministers in his Department were informed of potential safety concerns regarding third generation oral contraceptives. [19183]

Mr. Malone: Ministers were informed of the preliminary findings of the World Health Organisation's case control study on 14 July 1995.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to monitor the effects on public health of the dissemination of the advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines relating to third generation oral contraceptives. [19185]

Mr. Malone: Information from a variety of sources is being monitored, including data on the occurrence of cardiovascular diseases, pregnancy and abortion.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department made of the arithmetical accuracy of the tables made available by Professor Spitzer on 9 October 1995. [19191]

Mr. Malone: The tables provided by Professor Spitzer were assessed by experts on the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards are in place to ensure that the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines is independent. [19190]

Mr. Malone: The Committee on Safety of Medicines is an independent body of drug safety experts. Following consultation with appropriate organisations and on the recommendation of the Medicines Commission, its members are appointed by the United Kingdom Health Ministers—the Licensing Authority.

Members do not represent organisations, but contribute by their individual expertise and judgment to the advice given by the committee to the licensing authority. In addition, members are required to follow a code of practice on relations with the pharmaceutical industry and to declare their interests which are published annually.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many resignations have been received from staff of *(a)* the Medicines Control Agency and *(b)* the Committee on Safety of Medicines since 1 October 1995. [19184]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency has received six resignations since 1 October 1995; while the Committee on Safety of Medicines has received none.

Chelsea and Westminster NHS Trust

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received about the closure of the B12 unit at the Chelsea and Westminster NHS trust; and if he will make a statement; [19193]

(2) what representations he has received on the need for an independent inquiry into the closure of the B12 unit at the Chelsea and Westminster NHS trust; and if he will make a statement; [19195]

(3) what involvement his Department had in the decision to close the B12 unit at the Chelsea and Westminster NHS trust; [19194]

(4) what representations he has received on, and what assessment he has made of, the health risks faced by children whose treatment has been interrupted as a result of the closure of the B12 unit at the Chelsea and Westminster NHS trust; and if he will make a statement. [19196]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received several representations on the future of the vitamin B12 unit at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. The future inclusion of the vitamin B12 unit into the services provided by the Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare national health service trust is a matter for the trust and the Charing Cross and Westminster medical school.

Laparoscopic Surgery

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when an independent inquiry into an allegation of clinical negligence or misconduct involving the use of laparoscopic surgical techniques in a case of uterine cancer was last carried out in respect of the Northern and Yorkshire health region; by whom that inquiry was carried out; and at what cost. [19234]

Mr. Horam: Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority carried out an inquiry into an allegation about the use of laparoscopic surgical techniques in a case of uterine cancer in the second half of 1995. The hon. Member may wish to contact John Greetham CBE, chairman of the authority, for further details.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the use of laparoscopic surgical techniques for hysterectomy in the case of uterine cancer requires ethics committee approval. [19236]

Mr. Horam: Laparoscopic surgical techniques require local research ethics committee approval only if carried out as part of a research project.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he is preparing guidelines as to when laparoscopic surgical techniques may be used for hysterectomy in the case of uterine cancer; [19237]

(2) what guidelines exist covering the circumstances under which laparoscopic surgical techniques of hysterectomy may be used in the case of uterine cancer. [19238]

Mr. Horam: No guidelines exist covering specifically the circumstances under which laparoscopic surgical techniques of hysterectomy may be used in the case of uterine cancer. The development, publication and maintenance of guidelines for the clinical management of various groups of illnesses are the responsibility of the medical, nursing, dental and other clinicians and their professional bodies.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he issues as to the professional qualifications and usual place of work of individuals commissioned by regional health authorities to look into alleged cases of clinical negligence. [19235]

Mr. Horam: There is no formal guidance for regional health authorities that deals specifically with the investigation of alleged cases of clinical negligence.

Regional medical officers are responsible for arranging for two independent consultants to conduct the third stage of the current hospital clinical complaints procedure, called independent professional review. Existing guidance is contained in paragraph 27 of annexe B to health circular HC(88)37, copies of which will be placed in the Library. This states that the consultants should be in active practice in the appropriate speciality or specialties. They should be nominated by the joint consultants committee, and at least one should be a doctor working in a comparable hospital in a different region from that which is setting up the independent professional review.

A new national health service complaints system will be introduced from April 1996, in which there will no longer be separate procedures for dealing with clinical complaints.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a quarterly analysis of the number of operations cancelled in each region since figures have been published. [19497]

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library figures by *(a)* district health authority and *(b)* regional health authority, of the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to hospital and the number of those patients not readmitted within a month for (i) the second and (ii) the third quarter of 1995–96. [19471]

Mr. Horam: The national health service performs over 5 million operations annually. Fewer than 50,000 or less than 0.01 per cent. were cancelled in 1994–95 and many of these would have been unavoidable.

The available information relates to the number of operations cancelled for non-medical reasons on the day patients are due to arrive or after arrival in hospital. This will be placed in the Library.

Trust Managers (Pay Increases)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further advice he intends to issue to trusts regarding the appropriate level of pay increases to general and senior managers beyond that contained in HSG(961); and what monitoring he proposes to undertake. [19493]

Mr. Malone: None. These are matters for local determination following extant guidance and I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 13 February, *Official Report*, column 559.

Health Authorities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a list of the professions of those *(a)* nominated and *(b)* appointed to serve as non-executives on the newly merged health authorities. [19498]

Mr. Malone: A list of all non-executive appointments together with professions of appointees to national health service authorities and trusts will be published in the summer of 1996.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics his Department collects on hospital department closures. [19492]

Mr. Horam: The Department does not routinely collect information on hospital department closures. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on 28 February, *Official Report*, column *569*.

DEFENCE

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19423]

Mr. Arbuthnot: For parliamentary questions, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 14 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *609*.

Information on the number of hon. Members' letters passed to defence agencies to reply is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Bills (Payment)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average time taken by his Department in the payment of commercial bills in each year since 1993; and what are his Department's policies for the payment of commercial bills for contracts awarded to small companies. [19607]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Bills Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from T. R. Thurgate to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 8 March 1996:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average time taken by his Department in the payment of commercial bills in each year since 1993; and what are his Department's policies for the payment of commercial bills for contracts awarded to small companies. As this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Defence Bills Agency I have been asked to reply.

The statistics which are readily available go back to April 1993. During this time 99.99% of bills have been paid within 30 days of presentation of a valid bill. The Defence Bills Agency also measures performance against a higher departmental standard of payment within 11 days of receipt of a valid bill. We achieved the 1993/94 target of 96%, the 94/95 target of 97%, and are on course to achieve the 97% target for 95/96.

All new MOD contractors receive a 'Prompt Payment Guide' from the Defence Bills Agency, I have enclosed a copy for you. This booklet provides guidance on MOD payment procedures to help contractors submit bills correctly and therefore receive prompt payment.

Equipment Exports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the letter sent by him to defence industry firms concerning Government policy on exports of defence equipment to Iran in *(a)* 1984 and *(b)* 1985. [18539]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We are aware of one letter sent by the Ministry of Defence to a UK defence manufacturer in 1985 which referred to new policy guidelines in relation to exports to Iran and Iraq. Very few papers exist from the two years in question and it is possible that other letters were sent by the Ministry of Defence at the time.

Chechnya

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current policy on the sale of *(a)* aircraft and *(b)* other armaments to Chechnya; and if he will make a statement. [18270]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We do not sell defence equipment to Chechnya, which is internationally recognised as part of the Russian Federation.

Business Appointment Rules

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiries have been made with John Laing International to establish whether former officials or officers have failed to seek approval under the business appointments rules. [18961]

Mr. Arbuthnot: None. There has been no reason to write to the company about former MOD employees.

Air Vice-Marshal Howard

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *318*, when Air Vice-Marshal Howard retired; when he took up a business appointment with Tripod Engineering; and how long that appointment lasted. [19045]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have nothing to add to the information contained in section D2 of the Scott report.

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19460]

Mr. Arbuthnot: No central record is held of the extent to which computer capacity might have been brought from other Departments. Computer capacity has been

bought from many private sector sources, but again no central record is held. In both cases, information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. David Hart

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is Mr. David Hart's current job description within his Department; and what other job description he has held since assisting his Department. [19897]

Mr. Portillo: Mr. Hart has agreed to assist me with advice on any matter which I decide to refer to him. He is also free to raise matters with me. He had a similar arrangement with my predecessor.

Franco-German Armaments Agency

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which defence equipment projects for his Department he has identified as being suitable for management by the enlarged Franco-German Armaments Agency to include the United Kingdom. [19126]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The UK is considering a number of possible projects for management by the Franco-German organisation in the event of UK entry.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the relationship between the procurement executive of his Department and the Franco-German Armaments Agency following British participation in this agency. [19124]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The UK is currently discussing with France and Germany the implications of possible participation in the Franco-German armaments organisation. No decisions have been made on the organisation's policies and operating procedures.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the process of funding and financial accountability for defence equipment destined for his Department and managed by the Franco-German Armaments Agency enlarged to include the United Kingdom. [19125]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In the event of UK involvement in the Franco-German organisation, detailed management arrangements for collaborative projects will be determined before any commitment. The UK will not relax her standards of monitoring and control.

Multi-role Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to maintain a British capability to design, develop and build military vehicles in his evaluation of the options to meet the Army's multi-role armoured vehicle requirement. [19123]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We are discussing with France and Germany possible UK participation in the first stage of a collaborative venture to meet part of the UK's requirement for a multi-role armoured vehicle. The implications and opportunities for UK industry are an important factor in these discussions.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sea Empress

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department will make an assessment of the potential environmental after-effects of the Sea Empress oil spillage on the north Devon coastline and Lundy island and of the steps that need to be taken to manage and mitigate these effects. [17718]

Mr. Baldry: Our initial survey work suggests that there is no cause for concern of the effects of the Sea Empress oil spillage on the fisheries and wider marine environment along the north Devon coastline and Lundy island. We shall continue to monitor the environmental effects of oil spillage for as long as is necessary to be sure that this continues to be the case.

Oil Spillage Dispersants

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the level of oestrogen-mimicking chemicals in dispersants used to combat oil spillages; what assessment he has made of the long-term effects; and if he will make a statement.[17983]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* Oestrogen-mimicking chemicals are not components of any oil dispersant product approved by the Department for combating oil spilt in United Kingdom waters.

Environmental Objectives

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent measures his Department has taken to implement regulation 2078 in the United Kingdom, in respect of setting clear environmental objectives on *(a)* rural employment, *(b)* biodiversity, *(c)* pollution and *(d)* soil erosion; what measures have been taken in other EU member states; and if he will make a statement. [18613]

Mr. Boswell: The aim of Council regulation 2078/92—the "agri-environment regulation"—is to promote farming practices which are compatible with protection of the environment and maintenance of the countryside. It requires all EU member states to introduce programmes of environmental incentive schemes for farmers which reflect their own environmental circumstances and priorities.

The agri-environment regulation has been implemented in England by expanding the existing environmentally sensitive areas and nitrate sensitive areas schemes and by introducing a range of new incentive schemes addressing major environmental priorities such as creation of wildlife habitats, promotion of organic farming, conservation of heather moorland and access. We have also recently completed public consultation on proposals for the expansion and development of the countryside stewardship scheme when it transfers to MAFF from the Countryside Commission at the end of the month.

One of the main aims of our agri-environment programme is to protect and enhance biodiversity, and many of the schemes are contributing towards the Government's objectives under the biodiversity action plan. The schemes also address concerns over pollution by controlling or prohibiting inputs of fertilisers and

pesticides, and concerns over soil erosion through measures such as the reversion of arable land to grassland. The issue of rural employment falls outside the scope of regulation 2078/92; the Government's policy in this area is set out in the rural White Paper.

As indicated in the rural White Paper, we have now set up a national agri-environment steering group specifically to advise Ministers on the objectives, targeting, development and monitoring of agri-environment schemes. We have also set up a new national forum, which meets for the first time on 25 March, to allow a wide range of interested bodies the opportunity to feed in their own ideas on these issues.

Fishing Vessels (Ownership)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many boats on the United Kingdom fishing vessel register are in foreign ownership; and, of these, how many were registered *(a)* while in such ownership and *(b)* as a result of the vessels being sold by United Kingdom owners to foreign interests. [18960]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. David Harris, dated 7 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about vessels on the UK Fishing Vessel Register which are in foreign ownership.

When the Merchant Shipping (Registration of Ships) Regulations 1992 came into force in March 1994, the information you asked for ceased to be available. It is still possible to identify the nationality of individual owners but many fishing vessels are owned by companies and the nationality of the shareholders of these companies cannot be ascertained.

Before March 1994, the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 provided that corporate owners of fishing vessels registered in the United Kingdom had to be made up mainly of qualified shareholders. A company had therefore to complete a declaration that its shareholding complied with the Act. After the 1993 regulations came into force, the only requirement for eligibility in respect of companies is that they be incorporated in a member state of the European Economic Area and have a place of business in the UK. As a result of this change, it is no longer necessary to know the nationality of the shareholders and no such information is now collected.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Directives

Sir Richard Body: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Community directives were introduced by him into the law of the Untied Kingdom in 1995. [18292]

Mr. Oppenheim: Twelve Community directives—six Council/Council and Parliament directives and six Commission directives—were introduced as DTI measures into the law of the United Kingdom, all by way of statutory instrument, in 1995.

Arms Sale Guarantees

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 12 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *403*, if he will indicate, without revealing the contracts concerned, the four largest sums put up by Her Majesty's Government as a financial guarantee or collateral in respect of securing an arms deal. [15979]

Mr. Lang: The four largest guarantees issued by ECGD in respect of defence equipment sales were as follows:

Year guarantee issued	*ECGD liability £ Million*
1993–94	750
1988–89	450
1992–93	427
1985–86	378

Overseas Exhibitions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answers of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *253–56*, (1) which sections of the Data Protection Act 1984 preclude release of information relating to individual companies; [17811]

(2) which sections of the Data Protection Act 1984 preclude release of information relating to individual companies. [17395]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 26 February 1996]:* Regrettably, the information on which my answer of the 24 January was based was incomplete and arose from a misunderstanding which has now been corrected. Further advice indicates that the provisions of the Data Protection Act are not relevant to information about exhibitors supported by the Department at overseas trade fairs. This information is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

EDS Ltd.

Ms Eagle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those countries his Department currently holds with EDS, indicating for each the *(a)* date of inception, *(b)* value and *(c)* duration. [17456]

Mr. John M. Taylor: We have no current contracts with EDS let centrally. I have asked the chief executives of the Department's executive agencies to reply separately to this question.

Letter from Desmond Flynn to Ms Angela Eagle, dated 7 March 1996:

In the absence of Peter Joyce the Chief Executive I am responding on behalf of this Agency to your Parliamentary Written Question 95/1321 addressed to the President of the Board of Trade.

The Insolvency Service does not currently hold any contracts with EDS.

Letter from J. C. Octon to Ms Angela Eagle, dated 7 March 1996:

In the absence of the Comptroller General on official business, I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question about contracts with EDS. I can confirm that the Office currently has no contracts with that company.

Letter from Adrian Wilson to Ms Angela Eagle, dated 7 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question: 95/1321 about contracts currently held with Electronic Data Systems.

LGC does not currently hold any contracts with Electronic Data Systems.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Ms Angela Eagle, dated 29 February 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about contracts with EDS. This Agency holds no contract with the said company.

Letter from David Durham to Ms Angela Eagle, dated 29 February 1996:

You asked the President of the Board of Trade for information on contracts his Department currently holds with EDS regarding the date of inception, value and duration.

For Companies House the answer is none.

Letter from Jim Norton to Ms Angela Eagle, dated 7 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about contracts with EDS. I can confirm that the Radiocommunications Agency does not currently hold any contracts with EDS.

Scott Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on changes instituted in the Export Control Organisation since events covered by Sir Richard Scott in his report took place. [18555]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* The changes instituted in the Export Control Organisation since events covered by Sir Richard Scott in his report took place were set out in a press notice issued by my Department on 15 February 1996.

The Government are currently considering Sir Richard Scott's proposals and will publish a consultation paper in due course.

Post Office

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies have been undertaken by his Department since 1 January 1995 into the effectiveness of Post Office distribution; and what were the results. [18817]

Mr. Oppenheim: No specific studies into the effectiveness of Post Office distribution have been undertaken by my Department since 1 January 1995 as this is an operational matter for the Post Office. Quarterly and annual quality of service statistics obtained by independent survey have for many years been published for Royal Mail. These statistics show the percentage of first and second class mail delivered respectively within Royal Mail's target of the next working day and three working days. The efficiency study of the Post Office commissioned from KPMG in 1995 covered all main areas of the Post Office's operations. Its findings have been used to inform discussion and decision on a range of issues.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the performance review of the Post Office commissioned from the consultants KPMG; when it was completed; how it has been used; and if it will be published. [18968]

Mr. Oppenheim: The performance review of the Post Office commissioned from KPMG was completed on 31 August 1995 and has been used to inform discussion and decisions on a range of issues. These include in particular the setting of the Post Office external financing limits in last November's Budget, and consideration of the financial and efficiency targets which are to be set for Royal Mail, Post Office Counters and Parcelforce for the financial years 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99. The cost of work undertaken by individual contractors is commercially confidential. The contents of the report are confidential between the Government, their advisers and the Post Office board.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what will be the Government's target for real unit cost reduction for Royal Mail and Post Office Counters for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1988–99; [18970]

(2) what will be the Government's target for the return on capital employed in Royal Mail, Parcelforce and Post Office Counters for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [18969]

Mr. Oppenheim: The new financial and efficiency targets for Royal Mail, Post Office Counters and Parcelforce for the financial years 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 will be published when final decisions on them have been taken.

Bankruptcies

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were declared bankrupt in each year since 1990 for debts up to *(a)* £50,000, *(b)* £500,000 *(c)* £6 million and *(d)* over £6 million. [19091]

Mr. Oppenheim: The number of bankruptcy orders made in England and Wales since 1990 is as follows:

	Number
1990	12,058
1991	22,632
1993	31,016
1994	25,634
1995	21,933

Information regarding the size of debts could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Merseyside Special Investment Fund

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his Department's role in the establishment of the Merseyside special investment fund; which other organisations are involved in its establishment; and on what date its operations will commence. [18840]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The Department has worked with a range of private and public organisations to ensure that the proposed fund will complement existing provision of finance to small and medium-sized enterprises and will operate according to Government and European Commission financial requirements.

The Department and MSIF are currently considering with the European Commission their concerns about European regional development fund grant to the fund.

Mrs. Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the total budget of the Merseyside special investment fund; what will be the total level of Government financial support; and what will be the fund's other sources of finance. [18841]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The Department is considering an application from the Merseyside special investment fund for £16.1 million of European regional development fund grant towards its overall budget of £52.6 million. Other funding will primarily come from private sector contributions and income from companies supported by the fund.

Trade and Research Associations

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what amount of grant is paid each year to the trade associations representing the *(a)* paper, *(b)* leather, *(c)* shoe, *(d)* furniture, *(e)* timber and *(f)* textiles industries; [18378]

(2) what amount of grant is paid each year to the research associations related to the *(a)* paper, *(b)* leather, *(c)* shoe, *(d)* furniture, *(e)* timber and *(f)* textiles industries. [18379]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* None of these organisations receives any automatic grant annually from the Department. However, some receive discretionary grants to support specific competitiveness or export activities in their sectors. In 1994–95 the totals of such grants paid were as follows:

Sector	*Competitiveness support*	*Export support £ million*
Paper	0.360	—
Leather	0.020	0.214
Footwear	0.328	0.057
Furniture	0.109	0.862
Timber/Textiles	—	—
Clothing	0.348	2.084

Orimulsion

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will initiate discussions with National Power on the proposed import of orimulsion. [19252]

Mr. Page: No. The choice of fuel to be used in a power station is a commercial matter for the company concerned subject to the operation of the station being able to satisfy the requirements of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mid Kent Holdings

Sir John Stanley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to enforce the statutory undertaking given to him by General Utilities not to enter into any arrangement with an associated person which may result in his joint holdings in Mid Kent Holdings plc exceeding 19.5 per cent. [19515]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Under section 88 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 the Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to give advice to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade if it appears to him that a statutory undertaking has not been or is not being fulfilled. He also has a duty to advise where it appears to him that a person can be released from an undertaking or that the undertaking needs to be varied or superseded. The President of the Board of Trade will wish to consider carefully any advice he may receive from the Director General of Fair Trading in relation to the statutory undertakings given by General Utilities plc in March 1991 concerning the acquisition of shares in Mid Kent Holdings plc.

Public Bodies

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18642]

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Wages

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current average male wage. [17635]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The "New Earnings Survey" (1995) estimates that the average gross weekly earnings for men on full-time adult rates is £374.60 per week.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from her Department and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19043]

Mr. Sproat: Since it was established in April 1992, my Department has neither lost nor had stolen any items of equipment or furniture. Three items of IT material have been lost, none of which was valued over £5,000.

The Historic Royal Palaces agency has suffered no theft or other loss of any item of furniture, equipment or IT material.

The Royal Parks agency lost four small non-IT items in 1995, the total value of those items being £513.

Sport (London)

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to make a decision in respect of London as an international city of sport as defined by the Sports Council. [18906]

Mr. Sproat: Decisions on all applications for designation under the Sports Council's city of sport programme are entirely a matter for the Sports Council. However, I understand that the Sports Council is working closely with the London Sports Co-ordinating Committee which is developing an application.

Television Licence Fee

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to make an announcement on the proposals from the BBC for the introduction of a weekly cash instalment scheme for the payment of a television licence fee. [18911]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have given approval in principle to a BBC proposal to introduce a weekly cash instalment scheme for payment of the television licence fee. Regulations will have to drafted, and we will make an announcement when these are laid before the House. The BBC needs to make the necessary arrangements to implement the scheme, which it hopes to be in a position to do this summer.

BBC

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the new BBC charter and agreement will come into effect. [20251]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have considered the views of right hon. and hon. Members in the debate on 15 February, *Official Report*, columns 1172–1234, and those expressed in another place. We have considered whether there is substantial support for significant changes to be made to the draft royal charter or the agreement which was approved by this House. We have concluded that no such changes are warranted.

Many of the points raised related to specific aspects of the BBC's services. The new charter and agreement set out explicitly the broad standards we expect of the BBC. It is for the BBC to give more specific undertakings, after consulting its audiences, in its statement of pledges.

Concern was voiced that the BBC should reflect the needs of audiences throughout the UK. The new charter and agreement establish a clear framework to ensure that programme makers in all parts of the country make a proper contribution to the BBC's output, and that the BBC stays closely in touch with the needs and opinions of all viewers and listeners. The statement of pledges will underpin these commitments.

We have made explicit the independence of the BBC. Alongside this, the BBC must be accountable to the public. We have made it clear that the responsibility for ensuring the BBC fulfils its obligations rests with the board of governors.

The policies reflected in the draft charter and agreement will secure the future of the BBC for the next 10 years and allow it to flourish, at home and abroad, in its public services and its commercial enterprises, under its new chairman, Sir Christopher Bland. I am therefore making a representation to Her Majesty that the new charter now be granted to the BBC. Subject to Her Majesty's approval, I expect the new royal charter and agreement to come into force on 1 May 1996.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Treasury Solicitor's Office (Computer Disc Theft)

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 15 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *695*, what was the relationship between the two people who were the subject of the investigation by the Metropolitan police. [19358]

The Solicitor-General: Brother and sister.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 15 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *695*, what factors underlay the decision that it was not in the public interest to prosecute the woman against whom the Metropolitan police had established sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction. [19359]

The Solicitor-General: In order to ensure fair and nationally consistent decisions on prosecutions, the Crown Prosecution Service follows the guidance set out in the code for Crown prosecutors. Copies of the code, which is issued under section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, are available in the Library of the House. Section 6 of the code deals with the factors commonly taken into account in determining where the public interest lies. Those factors were applied in this case.

Public Interest Immunity

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions the public interest has been evoked in each of the last three years to protect from prosecution persons against whom the Metropolitan police had established sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction for *(a)* alleged theft and *(b)* blackmail. [19357]

The Solicitor-General: Following charge, or in cases where advice is sought, it is the Crown Prosecution Service which decides whether a prosecution should proceed or continue. While the service maintains detailed statistics on the cases, it deals with it does not break those figures down either by police force or by type of offence. In order to determine the number of cases which were not prosecuted on public interest grounds it would be necessary to check each file individually. This could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Restraint and Confiscation Orders

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Attorney-General how many restraint and confiscation orders have been obtained in each of the last three years; and for what amounts. [17142]

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Information about the number of "restraint orders" made by the High Court is not collected centrally by my Department.

Information about the number of confiscation orders made by courts in England and Wales is given in the table.

Offenders ordered to pay confiscation orders under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988 by amount and type of court 1992–94

England and Wales

Legislation/court/amount	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
DRUG TRAFFICKING OFFENCES ACT 1986			
Crown Court			
Orders made			
Under £1,000	675	712	921
£1,000 and under £3,000	164	126	160
£3,000 and under £10,000	82	78	97
£10,000 and under £30,000	43	37	29
£30,000 and under £100,000	22	15	22
£100,000 and under £300,000	13	7	9
£300,000 and under £1 million	1	6	8
£1 million and over	2	2	2
Total	1,002	983	1,248
CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT 1988			
Magistrates' Court			
Orders made			
£10,000 and under £30,000	—	—	1
£30,000 and under £100,000	—	—	—
£100,000 and under £300,000	—	—	—
£300,000 and under £1 million	—	—	—
£1 million and over	—	—	—
Total	—	—	1
Crown Court			
Orders made			
£10,000 and under £30,000	1	7	5
£30,000 and under £100,000	—	3	4
£100,000 and under £300,000	2	3	1
£300,000 and under £1 million	—	2	1
£1 million and over	—	—	1
Total	3	15	12

The quality of Confiscation Order data recorded under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 Part VI is suspect as it is often wrongly recorded.

TREASURY

Single European Currency

11. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will undertake a study of the implications of the length of time taken from the decision to introduce decimalisation to its introduction for the introduction of a single currency. [17628]

Mr. Waldegrave: If we were to take part in a single currency in 1999, we would be committed to the timetable agreed by the European Council in Madrid in December 1995.

19. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of a single European currency on Government spending in Britain. [17637]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is not immediately obvious that there need be any effects on Government spending, but it is too early to assess the possible impact of a single currency. A full assessment of the costs and benefits will be carried out nearer the time, when the facts are known.

Competitiveness

12. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with business leaders regarding the United Kingdom's economic competitiveness. [17629]

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend frequently meets business leaders where a wide range of topics, including our improving economic competitiveness, are discussed.

Trade Statistics

13. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statistics are retained by his Department on matters relating to trade. [17630]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Central Statistical Office publishes a large number of statistics covering a wide range of trade data.

European Currency Values

14. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he had made of the impact of the current value of the German mark and the French franc on the British economy; and if he will make a statement. [17631]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Sterling's value against the German mark and French franc are just two of many factors which influence the British economy. But we do know that the United Kingdom ran a visible trade surplus with EC countries in December for only the third time since monthly records began in 1988.

Export Credits Guarantee Requests

15. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what records he keeps in respect of Treasury decisions on export credits guarantee requests. [17632]

Mrs. Angela Knight: A record of exchanges between Ministers, minutes of meetings and correspondence between officials is kept for at least 10 years.

Mis-selling of Pensions

16. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he plans regarding the mis-selling of pensions. [17633]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government continue to support the initiative of the Securities and Investments Board, announced in October 1994, to require reviews of certain personal pension cases. A recent example is the inclusion in the current Finance Bill of provisions to exempt compensation payments from tax.

Government Borrowing

17. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of Government borrowing in the next financial year. [17634]

21. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of the level of Government borrowing in the next financial year. [17639]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Budget forecast of the public sector borrowing requirement for 1996–97 was £22.5 billion.

Drug Control Policy

18. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the Customs and Excise Department's drug control policy. [17636]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The reduction of supplies of drugs from abroad is a key part of the Government's strategy for tackling drug misuse, and maintaining the anti-smuggling enforcement effort is a top priority for customs. Customs' drug control policy focuses on:

the prevention and detection of illegal importation and exportation of controlled drugs;

the investigation of organisations and individuals engaged in international drugs smuggling;

the prosecution of drug smugglers; and

the identification to the courts for possible forfeiture of any proceeds of drugs smuggling.

VAT (Domestic Fuel)

20. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has had about VAT on domestic fuel. [17638]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have received a number of such representations from Members and direct from the public.

Budget (Impact on Women)

22. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements exist within his Department to assess the impact of his Budget on women. [17640]

Mr. Jack: The impact of the Budget on all groups is considered very carefully.

Landfill Tax

23. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the income from the tax on waste to landfill sites in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [17641]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The landfill tax is expected to raise £110 million in 1996–97 and £450 million in 1997–98.

Tax Evasion

24. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of revenue lost through tax evasion last year. [17642]

Mr. Jack: There is no reliable way of estimating the amount of tax evaded annually. But in each of the last four tax years, the Inland Revenue has brought into charge approximately £1.5 billion from its counter-evasion work.

Inheritance Tax

25. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people receive conditional exemption from inheritance tax because they allow the public access to their land. [17643]

Mr. Jack: As conditionally exempt property may be owned jointly by several persons or held in trust, information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, in the United Kingdom, there have been 189 designations of land for conditional exemption purposes, and 171 designations of historic buildings. Some designations of the buildings will have extended to the surrounding land, and some of the buildings will have been designated for the purposes of the tax provisions on maintenance funds rather than for conditional exemption of the buildings themselves.

Mortgage Interest Rates

26. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the level of mortgage interest rates for the forthcoming year. [17644]

Mrs. Angela Knight: It is a long-standing practice not to publish the details of the interest rate assumptions underlying official economic forecasts.

However, average building society mortgage interest rates are their lowest for a generation. As a result, average mortgage payments are currently £170 less a month, £150 less a month than five years ago. This has been possible only because of the Government's success in controlling inflation.

Savings

27. **Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the levels of savings held by the public. [17645]

Mr. Waldegrave: The 1995 Budget reduced tax on savings income for basic rate taxpayers, benefiting around 14 million taxpayers.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the levels of savings in *(a)* the last year and *(b)* the year to May 1979 in 1996 values; and if he will make a statement. [17988]

Mrs. Angela Knight: It is not possible to quote the levels of saving at 1996 values. Current national accounts practice is to revalue at 1990 prices. Total personal saving at 1990 prices in the 12-month period to September 1995—the latest available year—was £37.4 billion. The corresponding figure for the 12-month period to June 1979 was £30 billion. The national accounts are prepared quarterly and this is the closest period to May 1979 for which there are data. Information on personal sector saving at current prices is published annually in the Central Statistical Office Blue Book and quarterly in the CSO first release quarterly national accounts and is held on the CSO database; all sources are available in the Library.

Share Option Schemes

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what priority he attaches to increasing the number of employees participating in employee share option schemes. [17624]

Mr. Jack: Measures proposed in the Finance Bill are designed to encourage further and additional take-up of these schemes.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18632]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pre-retirement Courses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action heads of his agencies are taking to safeguard the provision of pre-retirement courses; and if he will make a statement. [19349]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Each of the Chancellor's agencies offer pre-retirement courses to its staff.

Female Employment

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for the Staffordshire region how many women are *(a)* unemployed, *(b)* in full-time employment and *(c)* in part-time work. [19491]

Mrs. Angela Knight: There were 7,801 women claiming unemployment-related benefits in Staffordshire in January 1996. The labour force survey sample of International Labour Organisation unemployed women in Staffordshire is too small to provide a reliable estimate.

The latest available information from the labour force survey on employment, however, shows there were 122,000 women in full-time employment and 107,000 in part-time employment in Staffordshire in summer—June to August—1995.

Companies (Reinvestment Relief)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the rules governing qualification for reinvestment relief relating to the percentage shareholding of any subsidiary companies and any overseas subsidiary companies; and if he will set out the relationship between these rules and the Government's policy drive for exports. [18905]

Mr. Jack: A company must not control, or own directly or indirectly, more than 50 per cent. of the share capital of any company which is not a qualifying subsidiary. There is no relationship between these rules and exports from the United Kingdom.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown, by region and gender, for (i) November 1990 and (ii) the latest date available, of *(a)* employees in temporary jobs because they could not find permanent employment, *(b)* the total number of employees in temporary jobs and *(c)* the total number of employees in temporary jobs as a proportion of the total number of employees in employment; [19103]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, by region and gender, for (i) November 1990 and (ii) the latest date available, of *(a)* employees in part-time jobs because they could not find full-time employment, *(b)* the total number employees in part-time jobs and *(c)* the total number of employees in part-time jobs as a proportion of the total number of employees in employment. [19104]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested can be obtained via the Quantine labour force survey service available for spring—March to May—1991 and spring 1995, the latest comparable quarter.

VAT (Opticians' Services)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the amount of VAT wrongly levied on opticians' services since 1988; and what steps he is taking to ensure that this money is returned to customers. [18730]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is estimated that the total amount of VAT to be refunded to opticians is of the order of £200 million. Where opticians acknowledge that VAT was passed on to customers, it is for the two sides to agree on the sum to be refunded. Where opticians have absorbed the VAT in their profits, they are under no obligation to pass on the refund to customers. Customs and Excise has no powers to insist that refunds are made to customers where the optician maintains they are not due.

Exempt Works of Art

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentages of items on the register of conditionally exempt works of art for which (i) the location other than the county is not specified and (ii) the listed telephone number is incorrect. [18494]

Mr. Jack: All items in the register of conditionally exempt works of art are shown only by their broad location, usually the county, to take account of owners' concern for the security of the exempted items. The requested information about the listed telephone numbers is not available.

The Inland Revenue monitors the operation of the exemption and the register by carrying out an annual sample audit of the exempted objects and by writing to owners every five years. The Inland Revenue's press release, issued with each quarterly update of the register, invites members of the public to write to the capital taxes office, Nottingham, if there is any difficulty in making satisfactory arrangements to view exempted objects. The capital taxes office has no evidence yet of any difficulties in practice.

Euro

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what expenditure he has authorised to date by the Royal Mint for preparations to produce coins and banknotes denominated in euros. [16090]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor gave him on 21 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *156*.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Statistics (Gender Breakdown)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps the Department is taking to collect statistics broken down by gender where relevant. [17693]

Mrs. Gillan: Gender is a key characteristic of many of the statistics we collect in the Department.

Capital Spending

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the capital spending by each local education authority in each of the last five years for which figures are available; what have been the Government capital allocations in each of those years and in all subsequent years for which allocations have been made. [19263]

Mrs. Gillan: Table A gives capital spending by local education authorities for the years 1990–91 to 1994–95 inclusive.

Government capital allocations over the years 1990–91 to 1996–97 inclusive and are given in table B.

Table A: Capital expenditure by LEAs 1990–91 to 1994–95

£000s

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
	Total expenditure	*Total expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Total expenditure (provisional)*
Corporation of London	18,181	0	25	2	2,779
Camden	1,256	2,819	1,542	409	1,353
Greenwich	'—	1,501	1,122	402	2,182
Hackney	1,492	1,203	1,212	1,535	2,585
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,169	2,071	4,738	3,398	2,304
Islington	3,872	1,947	598	851	1,283
Kensington and Chelsea	5,046	2,798	2,023	2,412	2,339
Lambeth	894	1,587	2,144	1,789	2,071
Lewisham	1,522	1,534	757	1,967	4,795
Southwark	'—	2,159	3,148	3,906	4,407
Tower Hamlets	19,602	17,103	12,918	12,068	11,718
Wandsworth	3,818	4,306	5,835	6,114	7,694
City of Westminster	1,301	1,848	1,298	1,025	3,016
Barking and Dagenham	2,073	7,249	6,604	3,013	5,561
Barnet	5,255	2,300	2,734	5,278	5,572
Bexley	2,666	2,365	3,206	5,606	5,411
Brent	6,447	3,727	2,496	1,639	1,321
Bromley	5,527	7,215	6,189	6,311	13,453
Croydon	15,764	8,439	4,532	3,772	7,045
Ealing	2,816	1,926	3,524	4,561	5,054
Enfield	20,457	16,146	2,990	2,356	2,131
Haringey	1,339	2,047	693	2,801	2,615
Harrow	3,057	3,538	5,442	5,099	5,741
Havering	7,618	4,848	2,739	1,024	1,631
Hillingdon	4,958	1,717	5,513	9,195	4,842
Hounslow	5,300	5,304	7,311	5,877	3,528
Kingston upon Thames	4,144	4,213	1,257	1,406	3,117
Merton	10,861	3,955	3,468	3,538	4,791
Newham	7,128	10,662	6,751	1,818	3,087
Redbridge	5,842	3,264	5,370	3,413	5,337
Richmond upon Thames	3,010	2,946	2,713	2,554	2,898
Sutton	7,536	7,292	3,907	3,426	4,353
Waltham Forest	6,973	3,441	5,869	7,264	3,996
Birmingham	14,121	14,507	12,690	12,853	16,647
Coventry	11,415	6,877	5,388	3,042	3,052
Dudley	4,640	6,667	10,935	4,047	4,746
Sandwell	4,352	2,740	2,190	5,581	5,625
Solihull	3,275	3,389	2,644	3,481	3,497
Walsall	2,957	2,447	2,508	1,528	1,791
Wolverhampton	2,189	2,631	3,224	3,304	2,298
Knowsley	2,885	1,297	2,548	2,496	2,069
Liverpool	3,371	2,477	2,367	3,457	6,277
St. Helens	4,530	7,084	2,168	1,698	1,708
Sefton	4,854	3,636	2,294	2,996	1,199
Wirral	4,135	4,630	2,718	1,294	1,165

Table A: Capital expenditure by LEAs 1990–91 to 1994–95

£000s

	1990–91 Total expenditure	1991–92 Total expenditure	1992–93 Total expenditure	1993–94 Total expenditure	1994–95 Total expenditure (provisional)
Bolton	3,683	1,530	2,037	1,642	1,777
Bury	1,324	1,085	1,047	618	1,491
Manchester	[1]—	6,907	9,807	9,171	12,593
Oldham	4,701	10,989	8,573	4,278	6,148
Rochdale	4,640	7,362	9,114	2,068	3,129
Salford	4,868	3,651	2,096	3,365	3,726
Stockport	3,123	2,552	2,033	1,933	1,694
Tameside	2,250	1,949	1,910	1,231	2,549
Trafford	11,207	5,333	5,572	5,515	4,008
Wigan	3,980	5,322	3,813	1,323	1,044
Barnsley	2,011	1,910	4,133	2,704	1,662
Doncaster	478	410	794	1,580	5,800
Rotherham	1,976	1,331	2,401	1,855	486
Sheffield	[1]—	6,302	7,022	8,188	8,181
Bradford	10,019	12,505	12,102	9,380	10,612
Calderdale	2,149	2,153	2,227	1,856	1,999
Kirklees	4,779	4,463	7,514	9,087	6,683
Leeds	10,903	20,429	25,556	21,537	9,799
Wakefield	[1]—	3,299	5,609	11,768	11,471
Gateshead	4,384	5,078	3,992	1,837	1,577
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,520	3,387	2,490	3,280	6,037
North Tyneside	2,122	1,963	2,331	3,603	4,854
South Tyneside	4,650	4,584	1,911	1,849	1,014
Sunderland	4,229	4,223	5,855	5,553	0
Isles of Scilly	212	50	117	35	22
Avon	10,539	15,323	14,077	8,979	8,069
Bedfordshire	3,219	1,872	5,880	5,531	5,207
Berkshire	10,662	7,357	16,234	17,656	17,079
Buckinghamshire	13,941	13,312	11,931	9,766	12,078
Cambridgeshire	16,232	22,713	23,230	8,596	10,921
Cheshire	10,778	16,465	21,908	19,022	21,310
Cleveland	6,643	4,954	4,786	4,103	5,715
Cornwall	12,333	11,435	14,611	10,787	7,989
Cumbria	8,306	10,100	12,325	12,859	10,016
Derbyshire	16,357	14,459	15,921	10,512	11,057
Devon	26,053	32,599	26,643	25,308	23,282
Dorset	8,900	13,195	14,622	11,837	20,180
Durham	5,822	7,159	8,218	6,863	6,684
East Sussex	13,937	17,275	18,156	16,494	17,832
Essex	19,713	23,992	19,844	17,971	23,824
Gloucestershire	11,956	10,569	7,331	9,338	10,775
Hampshire	33,101	25,013	23,715	24,508	34,322
Hereford and Worcester	11,919	10,656	5,493	7,807	8,427
Hertfordshire	14,040	14,091	13,432	11,702	16,845
Humberside	10,291	8,578	9,379	7,123	5,307
Isle of Wight	2,712	3,299	2,184	2,597	4,044
Kent	18,956	24,964	25,898	23,190	28,825
Lancashire	20,675	20,255	24,096	25,019	27,548
Leicestershire	13,282	12,543	12,373	10,344	10,374
Lincolnshire	11,667	18,463	19,485	15,641	16,346
Norfolk	6,936	6,152	5,707	7,490	6,724
North Yorkshire	5,586	10,844	8,170	7,070	4,715
Northamptonshire	4,956	3,966	3,250	8,438	5,701
Northumberland	2,969	5,460	5,338	2,968	2,503
Nottinghamshire	6,294	6,318	7,772	5,767	5,966
Oxfordshire	11,583	3,524	10,784	11,824	18,543
Shropshire	6,561	7,384	4,256	4,856	7,623
Somerset	7,777	5,770	11,132	10,412	8,466
Staffordshire	8,949	10,160	10,792	6,917	9,536
Suffolk	12,377	11,109	12,328	11,256	10,900
Surrey	17,896	17,366	15,917	22,179	22,566
Warwickshire	5,618	3,602	4,200	4,726	6,485
West Sussex	17,028	14,753	13,845	21,437	21,431
Wiltshire	9,483	10,009	9,949	6,403	5,626
Total	812,749[2]	797,677	797,610	732,158	799,281

[1] LEA did not submit information.

[2] Totals have been grossed to compensate for non-returns.

Table B: Local authority capital allocations: 1996–97

£ million

	Education credit approvals	*Receipts taken into account*	*Allocation for specialist schools*[1]	*Announced total education*[2]
1990–91[3]	426.10	49.00	—	475.10
1991–92[3]	492.00	46.00	—	538.00
1992–93[3]	559.70	36.00	—	595.70
1993–94	381.50	62.00	—	443.50
1994–95	379.20	31.00	—	410.20
1995–96	395.90	31.00	2.10	429.00
1996–97[4]	423.00	35.00	4.30	462.30

[1] Allocations for specialist schools are by way of supplementary credit approval. The 1996–97 allocations are yet to be made.
[2] Total of annual capital guidelines (ACGs) and supplementary credit approvals (SCAs).
[3] Includes allocations to the further education sector prior to the establishment of the Further Education Funding Council.
[4] Figures include a £42 million reserve for SCAs which will issue during 1996–97.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library a list of all overseas visits made by all Ministers of her Department, the Department for Education and the Department of Employment since 1990, including *(a)* details of the places visited and brief reasons for the visit, *(b)* details of the size, composition and cost to public funds of the delegation and *(c)* the names of non-ministerial members of each delegation and the capacity in which each was present. [17489]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* For information relating to the former Education and Employment Departments covering the period April 1992 to July 1995, I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my hon. Friends to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 5 and 6 July 1995, *Official Report*, columns *233* and *360* respectively. Information prior to April 1992 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I have arranged for details of the information requested since the Department for Education and Employment was created in July 1995 to be placed in the Library. It is not our normal practice to give the names of the delegates who accompany the Minister. However, a delegation would normally include a private secretary and those officials needed to provide advice on policy and technical issues.

Transsexuals (Discrimination)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what *(a)* legislative changes and *(b)* other measures she plans to eradicate discrimination against transsexuals in the workplace following the European Court of Justice ruling in the case of PVS and Cornwall county council. [19260]

Mrs. Gillan: The opinion of the Advocate General of the European Court of Justice was given on 14 December 1995. The court has yet to give its decision.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will remove the duty of investigating claims by parents seeking help under the assisted places scheme from participating schools and place such responsibility in the hands of an independent body. [19340]

Mrs. Gillan: Schools participating in the assisted places scheme determine eligibility for places and assess parental contributions towards fees, within the framework of the regulations and detailed guidance from the Department. Their discharge of these tasks is regularly audited. We continually seek ways of improving the administration of the scheme but have no present plans to remove responsibility from schools.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18641]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

EU Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much European funding has been received under the Socrates programme and predecessor schemes by *(a)* local education authority maintained schools, *(b)* grant-maintained schools, *(c)* city technology colleges and *(d)* independent schools, over the last available five-year period. [19144]

Mr. Forth: This information is not collected centrally. Available details of the funding allocated by the European Commission to institutions in the United Kingdom under Socrates and its predecessor programmes were given in my answer of 29 January 1996 to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), *Official Report*, column *562*.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 29 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *665*, what guidance she has given to accepted, or potential, providers of early-years education concerning selection of children, or parents, holding vouchers relating to them, when valid applications for places exceed the capacity of the settings they are authorised, or able, to provide. [19568]

Mr. Robin Squire: Places will be allocated according to providers' admissions criteria which they will be required to publish.

Nursery Education (Inspections)

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements have been made for the inspection of funded nursery education, as proposed in the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill. [20023]

Mr. Robin Squire: Subject to its passage through Parliament and royal assent, the Bill will place upon Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England the duty of securing the inspection of funded nursery education, or

nursery education under consideration for funding, provided at any premises. The chief inspector will also be required to maintain a register of nursery education inspectors for England and ensure that they satisfactorily complete a course of training. In order for inspections to commence from the autumn term of this year, the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England, Ofsted, must begin work immediately on the development of procedures for the recruitment and training of the inspectors.

Parliamentary approval to this new service is subject to the passage of the Bill to Royal Assent. Pending that approval, urgent essential expenditure in 1995–96 estimated at £75,000 will be met by advances from the contingencies fund, to be repaid from the 1996–97 Ofsted vote—class IX, vote 4.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* Mexborough and *(b)* Doncaster residents within the parliamentary constituency of Don Valley entitled to received cold weather payments the station used as the basis for calculations; in respect of how many days each area has received cold weather payments in winter 1995–96; what has been the total amount paid to date; and if he will make a statement. [17376]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 6 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list for (a) Mexborough and (b) Doncaster residents within the Parliamentary constituency of Don Valley entitled to receive Cold Weather Payments (CWPs) the station used as the basis for calculations; in respect of how many days each area has received cold weather payments in winter 1995–96; what has been the total amount paid to date; and if he will make a statement.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because statistics are not kept which are specific to Parliamentary Constituencies but are kept by Benefit Agency Districts.

Postal codes within the Rother and Dearne and Doncaster Districts are linked to the weather stations at Leeds and Waddington. A copy of the postal codes which are linked to each weather station is available in the Library. Leeds Weather Station has had 7 days of identified cold weather and Waddington has had 21 days.

Rother and Dearne District, which comprises the Benefit offices Goldthrope, Mexborough, Rotherham North, Rotherham South and Wath on Dearne, has made 24,032 CWPs amounting to £204,272 and Doncaster District, which comprises the Benefit offices Doncaster Castle House and Doncaster St. Peters House, has made 46,602 CWPs amounting to £396.117.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in *(a)* West Yorkshire and *(b)* the Dewsbury constituency have received (i) one, (ii) two, (iii) three and (iv) four cold weather payments in the past three months. [17335]

Mr. Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Ann Taylor, dated 6 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in (a) West Yorkshire and (b) the Dewsbury constituency have received (i) one, (ii) two, (iii) three and (iv) four cold weather payments in the past three months.

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are not kept which are specific to Parliamentary Constituencies but are kept for Benefit Agency Districts. Also information is not kept on the number of people who received payments but is available to show the total number of payments made. The numbers of payments issued to each individual could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

However information is available for each district office (including the district which covers the Dewsbury area) in West Yorkshire for the last three months and is given at Appendix A.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Appendix A: Number of cold weather payments paid in West Yorkshire 1995–96

District Benefit Offices	*Number paid*
Bradford	
Bradford East	
Bradford South	
Bradford West	130,643
Kirklees	
Dewsbury	
Huddersfield	66,442
Leeds Aire and Wharfe	
Leeds North	
Leeds North-west	16,828
Leeds Ridings	
Leeds East	
Leeds South	
Leeds West	24,732
Wakefield	
Castleford	
Hemsworth	
Pontefract	
Wakefield	18,226
Yorkshire Penine	
Halifax	
Keighley	
Skipton	88,824

Figures are provisional and subject to change. These figures do not include any clerical payments that may have been made in January and February as this information is not yet available. The data given are the number of actual payments made and not the number of people who received a payment.

EDS Ltd.

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those contracts his Department currently holds with EDS, indicating for each the *(a)* date of inception, *(b)* value and *(c)* duration. [17457]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested.

The contracts and agreements currently held with EDS are as follows:

Child Support Agency (CSA)

	Start date	*Duration (years)*
CSA Software Support Services Agreement	7 March 1992	10
CSA Operational Accounting System	7 March 1992	10
CSA Maintenance Assessment	8 July 1992	10
CSA Technical Services Agreement	1 May 1994	3

The total value of these contracts is £23 million. The value of individual contracts is commercial in confidence.

Information Technology Services Agency (ITSA)

	Start date	*Duration (years)*
ITSA Data Centre Services	1 October 1995	10

The charges for these contracts are based on the volumes of outputs handled, and therefore values will depend on future levels of business. Current estimates are that over the 10-year period charges will be in the region of £600 million.

"Options for Equality" Report

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what conclusions he has reached on the recommendations of the 1992 Social Security Advisory Committee report "Options for Equality in State Pension Age" that *(a)* there should be a new premium with income support for those unemployed for more than two years and aged over 55 years and long-term sick or disabled aged over 55 years, *(b)* invalid care allowance should be extended to 65 years for women and *(c)* the relationship between invalidity benefit and retirement pension should be reviewed. [18483]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Government have noted the comments of the 1992 Social Security Advisory Committee's proposals, including the three listed.

We have no plans to introduce a new premium in income support. The existing premium structure directs additional resources to those groups identified as having extra needs.

Regulations came into force on 28 October 1994 equalising the upper age limit for claiming invalid care allowance at 65 for both men and women.

Invalidity benefit was replaced by incapacity benefit on 13 April 1995. Entitlement to the long-term rate of incapacity benefit ends when a person reaches state pension age. We have no plans to change this condition.

Mobility Centres

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the level of Government funding for the United Kingdom forum of mobility centres. [18542]

Mr. Burt: The table sets out the Government support to two members of the UK forum of mobility centres. In addition, the Department of Transport funds its own mobility centre—the mobility advice and vehicle information service—which is based at Crowthorne, Berkshire.

Forum member	*Allocation 1995–96 £*
Banstead Mobility Centre	54,000
Mobility Information Service	13,000

Publicity Costs

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent in 1995 on publicising leaflet DS704; and how much is to be spent in 1996. [18546]

Mr. Roger Evans: Leaflet DS704 forms part of the Benefits Agency's extensive leaflet programme and, as such, it is made available in a number of ways. There is no specific advertising of this leaflet and to extract a figure for its part of the overall budget for publicising benefits could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensioners' Incomes

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what longitudinal studies of pensioners' incomes he has conducted to investigate the extent to which the incomes of a representative sample of pensioners have changed since 1979; and if he will publish the results of these studies. [18336]

Mr. Heald: There are no DSS studies of the type described. We have commissioned a longitudinal survey of a nationally representative sample of people who were aged 55 to 69 when first interviewed in 1988–89. The results of the initial interviews can be found in an Office of Population Censuses and Surveys report entitled "Retirement and Retirement Plans", a copy of which is available in the Library. In 1994 this group were re-interviewed and a report based upon both sets of interviews will be published by the summer of 1997. Information on the average incomes of pensioners 1979–1993 is published in "Pensioners' Incomes Series 1993", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Disabled People (Discrimination)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action the Government are taking to tackle discrimination against disabled people *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Greater Manchester area. [18347]

Mr. Burt: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which applies to the whole of the United Kingdom, will make discrimination against disabled people unlawful in the fields of employment, services and property. It also includes measures to improve access to transport and education. The National Disability Council has been set up to advise the Government on the elimination of discrimination against disabled people and the operation of the Act.

Motability

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what monitoring his office carries out of Motability and Motability Finance Ltd.; and what representations he has received about Motability Finance Ltd.'s financial arrangements and profits. [18547]

Mr. Burt: Motability is required to report to the Department in accordance with conditions set out in the financial memorandum, the latest copy of which is in the Library. Motability Finance Ltd., MFL, is neither funded by nor accountable to this Department. Representations about the finance arrangements and profits of MFL have been received from several Members of both Houses, and a few members of the public.

Income Support (Mortgages)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many borrowers who have claimed income support for help with mortgages since October 1995 are currently repaying loans at a rate higher than the 5 per cent. standard rate set by his Department in October 1995; and what savings this interest rate ceiling has produced to date. [18302]

Mr. Roger Evans: The standard rate applied under the income support mortgage interest scheme is 8 per cent.; prior to 28 January it was 8.39 per cent. The standard rate is applied unless the borrower's actual interest rate is less than 5 per cent. when help with mortgage interest payments begins. In such cases, that rate is used until the borrower's actual rate increases to 5 per cent. or more, at which stage, the standard rate is applied. Information on the claimant's actual interest rate is not collected when the standard rate is applied. Outturn information on savings from the introduction of the standard rate will become available when the February 1996 quarterly statistical inquiry is published.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is estimated to be the total value of *(a)* employers' and *(b)* employees' national insurance contributions; and what would be the corresponding total values if (i) contributions at present rates were collected on all earnings, (ii) contributions at present rates were extended only to earnings below the lower earnings level and (iii) contributions at present rates were extended only above the upper earnings level in (1) 1994–95, (2) 2000–01, (3) 2010–01, (4) 2020–01 and (5) 2030–01, at 1994 prices. [18914]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table:

Gross Class 1 National Insurance Contributions in Great Britain at 1994–95 prices

£ billion

	1994–95	*2000–01*	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*
(a) Employers					
Current structure	26.7	33.0	40.3	46.9	52.4
(i) Extended to all earnings[1]	26.9	33.1	40.4	47.0	52.5
(ii) Extended to earnings below LEL[1]	26.9	33.1	40.4	47.0	52.5
(iii) Extended to earnings above UEL[2]	26.7	33.0	40.3	46.9	52.4
(b) Employees					
Current structure	20.1	24.4	28.0	30.1	30.7
(i) Extended to all earnings[3,4]	23.1	29.6	36.1	[5]42.0	[5]47.0
(ii) Extended to earnings below LEL[3]	20.2	24.5	28.1	[5]30.1	[5]30.7
(iii) Extended to earnings above UEL[4]	23.0	29.5	36.0	42.0	47.0

Notes:
[1] Assumes the current 3 per cent. contribution rate would apply to earnings below the Lower Earnings Limit.
[2] There is no Upper Earnings Limit on employers' contributions.
[3] Assumes the current 2 per cent. contribution rate would apply to earnings below the Lower Earnings Limit.
[4] Assumes the current 10 per cent. contribution rate would apply to earnings above the Upper Earnings Limit.
[5] The additional yield from contributions on earnings below the Lower Earnings Limit is estimated to be negligible.
1. The figures for 2000–01 and later years are based on the assumptions contained in the "National Insurance Fund Long Term Financial Estimates" (HC160) published in January 1995. All figures exclude the effects of contracted-out rebates.
Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of men aged between 60 and 64 years who paid employee's national insurance contributions in the last year for which figures are available. [19496]

Mr. Heald: In the 1992–93 tax year 571,000 men[1] aged between 60 and 64 at 5 April 1993 paid some employee's national insurance contributions.

Notes:
Includes men who paid a mixture of class 1 employee and class 2 self-employed national insurance contributions.
Source:
1 per cent. sample of national insurance records.

Hearing Loss

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the net saving or additional cost from abolishing lump sum awards to ex-service people with an attributable hearing loss of 20 per cent., taking into account the extra costs of appeal hearings by the pensions appeal tribunals since abolition; and if he will make a statement. [18953]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 6 March 1996]:* Any service-related disablement assessed at 20 per cent. or more attracts a continuing pension rather than a lump sum gratuity.

The threshold excluding payment of war pension gratuities for service-related noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss assessed at less than 20 per cent. came into operation from 7 January 1993. We estimate that, between that date and the end of January this year, the total cost of the gratuities otherwise payable would have been over £130 million.

The estimated administrative cost of appeals heard by the pensions appeal tribunals involving the assessment of noise-induced sensorineural deafness in the same period is approximately £2 million.

The change on noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss formed part of a package which increased considerably, from April 1993, the war pensions of the most severely disabled ex-service men and women. Nearly 265,000 war pensioners are now benefiting from the increase at an estimated annual cost of some £26 million.

WALES

Teachers' Pay Award

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide additional funds to local education authorities to match the teachers' pay award; and if he will make a statement. [18448]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend's decisions on the Welsh local government revenue settlement for 1996–97 were approved by the House of Commons on 8 February. The settlement is consistent with the Government's commitment to restrain public expenditure and is sufficient for all local authorities in Wales to fund services adequately.

The School Teachers Review Body took account of the Government's policy on public spending, including their view that increases in public sector pay should be met from improvements in productivity and efficiency, along with evidence submitted by the teachers' unions and the employers, in formulating its recommendations.

The Government do not consider it appropriate to provide additional resources to fund the pay award. The money could be found only at the cost of other important spending programmes, such as health. The decision to stage the award, increasing pay scales by 2.75 per cent. from 1 April 1996 and by a further 1 per cent. on 1 December 1996, will help local authorities and schools absorb the increases and meet the demand of other budgetary pressures.

Strategic Development Scheme

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much the county of Mid Glamorgan received in 1995 from the strategic development scheme; and if he will make a statement. [18271]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The strategic development scheme funding approved in 1995–96 for local authorities in the county of Mid Glamorgan is:

Local authority	*Total approved* £
Mid Glamorgan county council	4,961,500
Cynon Valley borough council	3,262,032
Merthyr Tydfil borough council	1,445,640
Ogwr borough council	1,122,622
Rhondda borough council	2,708,758
Rhymney Valley district council	1,080,067
Taff Ely borough council	815,220
Total	15,395,829

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of the money allocated to Mid Glamorgan under the strategic development scheme for 1996 will be spent on new schemes; and if he will make a statement. [18273]

Mr. Jones: Strategic development scheme support for new schemes in 1996–97 has been allocated to new unitary authorities as follows:

Unitary authorities	*Allocations for new schemes* £
Bridgend	818,000
Caerphilly	1,855,000
Merthyr	492,000
Rhondda Cynon Taff	4,037,250
Total	7,202,250

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much he estimates will be allocated to Wales in 1996 under the strategic development scheme; and if he will make a statement. [18269]

Mr. Jones: A total of £63 million has already been allocated for 1996–97 under the strategic development scheme for projects to revitalise Welsh communities, regenerate town centres and open up new areas of investment and opportunity in areas of need.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much the county of Mid Glamorgan will receive in 1996 from the strategic development scheme; and if he will make a statement. [18272]

Mr. Jones: Strategic development scheme support in 1996–97 has been allocated to new unitary authorities as follows:

Unitary authority	*Total allocation (£)*
Bridgend	1,408,972
Caerphilly	4,210,451
Merthyr	1,660,407
Rhondda Cynon Taff	9,742,909
Total	17,022,739

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total of money allocated to Wales in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995 under the strategic development scheme; and if he will make a statement. [18274]

Mr. Jones: The total allocated to local authorities in Wales under the strategic development scheme was *(a)* £59.4 million in 1994–95 and *(b)* £57 million in 1995–96. Outturn allocations for 1995–96 may vary.

Chernobyl

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what considerations led him not to include data on the effects and quantities of radioactivity from the Chernobyl accident in his Department's ninth annual "Environmental Digest for Wales". [18550]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The "Environmental Digest for Wales" is a wide-ranging compilation of statistics on the Welsh environment but is not intended to be exhaustive. The Chernobyl accident is referred to on page 110 of the digest, together with sources for further information. Appendix 4 of the digest gives references to additional data held in earlier editions.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance he plans to make available to colleges of further education in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [18451]

Mr. Richards: The Department's letter of 13 December 1995 to the Further Education Funding Council for Wales set out the Government's priorities for the Welsh further education sector in 1996–97. It announced that £173.423 million of grant in aid would be made available to the funding council in that year. A copy of the letter was placed in the Library of the House.

Ofsted Budget

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the Ofsted budget in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; what the outturn figure for 1995–96 will be; and if he will make a statement. [18447]

Mr. Richards: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. Mr. Chris Woodhead will write to the hon. Member.

Cocaine-related Deaths

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cocaine-related deaths have occurred in each of the past five years in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [18267]

Mr. Richards: According to records kept by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, no death certificates relating to deaths of Welsh residents in the period 1990 to 1994 mention cocaine.

Doctors

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients were registered with NHS family doctor practices in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1995, indicating the figures as a percentage of the population in Wales. [18819]

Mr. Richards: Information on patients registered with general medical practitioners (family doctors) in Wales is given in the following table. The figures may include people who, although registered with doctors in Wales, are not Welsh residents and people who are still registered with a doctor but who have either died or moved and not re-registered.

	Number of patients registered	*Percentage of population*
1 October 1980	2,862,239	102
1 October 1985	2,915,168	104
1 October 1990	2,963,612	103
1 April 1995[1]	2,982,429	102

[1] The latest data available. The 1994 population figure has been used to calculate the percentage as 1995 data are not yet available.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* junior doctors, and *(b)* other hospital doctors there were in (i) 1985, (ii) 1990 and (iii) 1995. [18739]

Mr. Richards: The information is given in the following table:

Whole-time equivalent number of staff in post (excluding locums)

	Junior hospital doctors[1]	*Other hospital doctors*[2]
30 September 1985	1,305	893
30 September 1990	1,394	1,042
30 September 1995[3]	1,651	1,321

[1] House officers, senior house officers, registrars and senior registrars.

[2] Consultants, staff grades, associate specialists, hospital practitioners and clinical assistants.

[3] Provisional.

Trainee Nurses

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of trainee nurses for *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [18729]

Mr. Richards: New arrangements for pre-registration nurse education and training were phased in under Project 2000. Information on the numbers of Project 2000 students and pre-registration learners other than Project 2000 students is given in the following table:

	Project 2000 students	*Pre-registration learners (excluding Project 2000)*
30 September 1993	1,709	1,042
30 September 1994	2,062	145
30 September 1995	1,851	8

Regional Development Funding

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total money allocated to Wales under the objective 2 programme in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [18610]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The amounts allocated in the objective 2 industrial south Wales single programme document 1994–95 are:

(a) 1994: 59.76 mecu

(b) 1995: 62.32 mecu

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much he estimates will be allocated to Wales in 1996 under the objective 2 programme; and if he will make a statement. [18606]

Mr. Jones: The amount allocated for 1996 in the objective 2 industrial south Wales single programme document 1994 to 1996 is 65.92 mecu. Our intention is to commit to projects all the programmes available grant resources by the end of 1996.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much the county of Mid Glamorgan received in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995 from the objective 2 programme; how much it will receive in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [18605]

Mr. Jones: Payments to projects in the county of Mid Glamorgan under previous industrial south Wales objective 2 programmes were as follows: *(a)* £9.3 million in 1994; and *(b)* £4.4 million in 1995. Payments made to date under the 1994 to 1996 programme will register in 1996.

It is not possible to quantify how much will be received by the county of Mid Glamorgan in 1996 since this is dependent on future approvals under the latest programme and sponsors submitting claims for grant to the Welsh Office on time.

Livestock Quotas

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh producers applied unsuccessfully for assessment of applications to category 3 as developers, in respect of the 1993 national quota reserve; and if he will make a statement. [18809]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A total of 807 applications from sheep producers and 226 applications from suckler cow producers were unsuccessful.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what publicity is given to the closing date for applications for the sheep and suckler cow quota. [18808]

Mr. Jones: Details of the opening and closing dates for the various national reserve application periods are announced through Welsh Office press releases. In addition, we inform the main farming organisations and, in certain circumstances, write to individual producers.

Smoking

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in Wales aged 15 to 20 years smoke; and if he will make a statement. [18607]

Mr. Richards: The 1994 Welsh youth health survey shows that in the 15 to 16 age group, 26 per cent. of males and 34 per cent. of females smoke at least occasionally. The 1993 Health in Wales shows that in the 18 to 20 age group 28 per cent. of male and 25 per cent. of females smoke at least occasionally. No survey has included 17-year-olds.

Road Construction

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the planned expenditure on road construction on Wales in *(a)* 1995 to 1996 and *(b)* 1996 to 1997; and if he will make a statement. [18784]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Provisional outturn for central Government net expenditure on new construction and improvement of motorways and trunk roads in 1995–96 is £118 million. Net provision for 1996–97 is £86.7 million.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *496*, in which month the financial problems of the South East Wales ambulance trust became apparent; and on what date his Department commenced its close contact with the trust. [18625]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* The trust has provided monthly financial information to my Department since May 1993. My Department became concerned about the financial performance of the trust following a meeting on 24 June 1994. The financial information submitted by the trust in August reinforced these concerns. A letter was sent to the chief executive on 2 September 1994 expressing the Department's disquiet and asking for an assurance that the necessary action would be taken to meet statutory financial obligations.

Theatr Clwyd

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to visit Theatr Clwyd, Mold, Clwyd; and if he will make a statement. [18928]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I visited Theatr Clwyd on Wednesday 28 February.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make representations to *(a)* Welsh and *(b)* English local authorities in the vicinity of Theatr Clwyd to make additional contributions to the running costs of Theatr Clwyd, Mold. [18917]

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further discussions he intends to undertake with Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wrexham and Abercolwyn/Conwy councils regarding the future funding of Theatr Clwyd, Mold. [19479]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In his letter to the leader of Flintshire county council offering a one-off grant of £1.3 million to discharge Theatr Clwyd's outstanding capital debt, my right hon. Friend made it clear that he was looking to Flintshire to undertake urgent consultations with local authorities in the area, and any other interested parties, with a view to securing financial support for the running of the theatre. This responsibility rests with Flintshire county council.

Schools (Music)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he has taken to assist the teaching of music in schools. [18918]

Mr. Richards: The Bright Future programme applies to music as to every other discipline.

Manufacturing Jobs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his priorities in respect of his proposals to create jobs in the manufacturing sector. [18921]

Mr. Hague: During the Welsh Affairs debate on 29 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns 1024–98, I set out those areas of policy that I considered most important to the economy of Wales, and in particular to the manufacturing sector.

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19042]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows for the Welsh Office and its agency:

	Non-IT		*IT material*	
Year	*Number*	*Value £*	*Number*	*Value £*
Items of equipment and furniture stolen				
1991–92	14	4,972.10	Nil	—
1992–93	5	1,682.80	Nil	—
1993–94	8	2,037.17	1	1,183.74
1994–95	5	23,220.08	Nil	—
1995–96	22	23,513.53	6	3,415.73
Items of equipment and furniture unaccounted for				
1991–92	27	95.00	Nil	—
1992–93	1	25.00	Nil	—
1993–94	Nil	—	Nil	—
1994–95	17	94.23	Nil	—
1995–96	1	68.49	17	5,500.00

There were no individual items valued at £5,000 or more

Teacher Morale

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to improve the morale of teachers; and if he will make a statement. [18923]

Mr. Richards: Good teachers are motivated by the desire to see their pupils achieve, and by the sense of purpose and direction which a good senior staff team is able to create in a school. The document "A Bright Future", published last year, focuses on these issues, and has been well received by teachers in Wales.

Unemployment Benefit (Alyn and Deeside)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the amount of unemployment benefit paid to claimants in the Alyn and Deeside constituency in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995, separately indicating the sums for (i) long-term unemployed and (ii) those aged 18 to 24 years. [18929]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 8 March 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will reply to the letter sent to him by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire on 19 January, reference GK/AB/190196. [19210]

Sir Paul Beresford: I wrote to the hon. Member on 7 March 1996.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19426]

Mr. Gummer: The information requested on correspondence could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The number of parliamentary questions answered by the Department's agencies in each of the past five years and the percentage of questions that it represents is as follows:

Year	*Number of questions answered by Agencies*	*Total number of questions answered*	*Percentage answered by Agencies*
1992	20	5,899	0.3
1993	3	3,750	0.08
1994	5	3,970	0.1
1995	9	3,614	0.2
1996	[1]1	[2]1,031	0.09

[1] This question required a written reply from all four agencies
[2] As at 1 March 1995.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18645]

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally, and cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Health and Safety Inspections Leaflet

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what consultation was undertaken before the recent publication by the Health and Safety Commission of the leaflet entitled "Your rights when health and safety inspectors take enforcement action", and *(a)* which organisations were invited to respond, *(b)* how many responses were received and *(c)* what proportion favoured the need for the advice leaflet; [19518]

(2) what cost effective activity by business is promoted by the publication by the Health and Safety Commission of the advice leaflet "Your rights when health and safety inspectors take enforcement action"; and if he will make a statement. [19522]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Commission's leaflet "Your rights when health and safety inspectors take enforcement action" publicises enforcement procedures drawn up by the commission to ensure the health and safety enforcement lines up with the principles in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. The Government accepted the recommendation of the deregulation task force in its first annual report for the widespread adoption of these principles, which were introduced to give business rights of representation before formal enforcement action is taken.

In drawing up the procedures and the leaflet, the commission sought the views of local authorities, through the health and safety liaison committee, and of the deregulation task force. Heads of all Health and Safety Executive inspectorates were also consulted. All provided helpful comments.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recommendations from the deregulation unit were included in the recent publication by the Health and Safety Commission leaflet entitled "Your rights when health and safety inspectors take enforcement action". [19519]

Sir Paul Beresford: Officials from the Cabinet Office deregulation unit and the Health and Safety Executive worked closely in drawing up this leaflet to ensure it followed the enforcement principles in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the use of the publication "Your rights when health and safety inspectors take enforcement action" in maintaining and improving standards of health, safety and welfare of workers; and if he will make a statement. [19520]

Sir Paul Beresford: The procedures set out in the leaflet follow the principles in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 which were designed to improve the fairness, transparency and consistency of enforcement action without jeopardising any necessary protection. The procedures do not weaken the protection afforded by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. They do not affect inspectors' powers to take immediate enforcement action against business, or to require business to take immediate remedial action, in any case where it appears to inspectors to be necessary to take such action or impose such a requirement. The commission is monitoring how the procedures are working in practice and will report to me.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the impact of the procedures set down in Health and Safety Commission leaflet "Your rights when health and safety inspectors take enforcement action" will be on the role of the workplace safety representative; and if he will make a statement. [19521]

Sir Paul Beresford: The role of the workplace safety representative remains unchanged. Inspectors will continue to seek views from employees or their safety representatives and make suitable arrangements to provide them with information on the action required of business. Inspectors also now provide a copy of the commission's leaflet.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19912]

Sir Paul Beresford: Neither of these companies are currently bidding for these contracts in the Department of the Environment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19908]

Sir John Wheeler: There are currently no examples of the companies named being involved in bidding for work in the Departments in Northern Ireland.

EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what mechanisms are being used by his Department to make payments under the EU special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. [20495]

Sir John Wheeler: Parliamentary approval for the making of payments under the EU special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland has been sought in the spring supplementary estimates. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure for new services will be met by repayable advances from the civil Contingencies Fund.

TREASURY

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what officials from the Treasury attended the Scottish Grand Committee meeting in Aberdeen on Monday 19 February; how many of these were press officers; and what was the total cost involved. [18570]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I attended the Scottish Grand Committee meeting in Aberdeen accompanied by a private secretary and a press officer.

The total cost for their attendance was £555.

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19456]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has not purchased any computer capacity from any Government Department or private sector company since 1987.

Earnings

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the average hourly earnings of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees in each of the standard regions (i) including and (ii) excluding employees covered by national agreements. [19576]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information available from the new earnings survey is provided in the following table.

New Earnings Survey 1995 (GB)
Hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence

	Full-time Employees covered by national agreements:		*Part-time Employees covered by national agreements:*	
Standard Region	*Included* £	*Excluded* £	*Included* £	*Excluded* £
South East	9.77	9.84	6.32	5.80
East Anglia	7.49	7.26	5.10	4.75
South West	7.77	7.55	5.22	4.86
West Midlands	7.58	7.34	5.25	4.82
East Midlands	7.42	7.14	5.17	4.78
Yorkshire and Humberside	7.43	7.14	5.24	4.86
North West	7.81	7.59	5.47	4.95
North	7.35	7.08	5.08	4.69
Wales	7.41	7.06	5.09	4.61
Scotland	7.78	7.52	5.25	4.79

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19899]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has no current dealings with Capita Management Services or Lusis Business Solutions.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

School Leavers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of school leavers have gone directly into higher education in each year since 1980. [19485]

Mr. Forth: Numbers of school leavers going directly into higher education are not collected centrally. However, the proportion of young people entering full-time higher education has more than doubled since 1980 as shown in the following list.

Academic year beginning in:

1980: 13
1981: 13
1982: 13
1983: 13
1984: 14
1985: 14
1986: 14
1987: 15
1988: 15
1989: 17
1990: 19
1991: 23
1992: 28
1993: 30
1994: 31[1]

[1]Provisional.

Figures show the number of young—aged under 21 years—home domiciled initial entrants to higher education in Great Britain expressed as a percentage of the averaged 18 to 19-year-old population. Initial entrants are those entering a full-time course of higher education for the first time.

School Buildings

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the budget for repairs and maintenance of school buildings in real terms in each year since 1979. [19448]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows in 1995 prices gross recurrent expenditure by local education authorities in England on repairs and maintenance from 1979–80 to 1994–95.

Repairs and maintenance of buildings fixed plant and grounds

	1995 prices £000
1979–80	580,003
1980–81	599,060
1981–82	552,319
1982–83	581,652
1983–84	616,316
1984–85	598,008
1985–86	565,595
1986–87	616,805
1987–88	618,385
1988–89	579,596
1989–90	631,736
1990–91	618,283
1991–92	625,818
1992–93	583,974
1993–94	527,906
1994–95[1]	534,295

[1] Provisional.

Student Grants

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her Department's estimate for the total parental contribution to higher education student maintenance awards. [19360]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* The total assessed parental contribution to mandatory awards made by local education authorities in England and Wales for the academic year 1993–94, the latest year for which data are available, was £621 million.

School Inspections (Don Valley)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for *(a)* the schools which the Office of Standards in Education plan to inspect in the Don Valley constituency in the next 12 months, *(b)* the dates during which inspections are to be made, *(c)* the dates on which inspection contracts were approved and *(d)* the date by which Ofsted will report the outcome of the inspection. [19689]

Mr. Robin Squire: This is a matter for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in her Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19913]

Mr. Robin Squire: Capita Managed Services has recently submitted a tender to administer the teachers' superannuation scheme under the contractorisation process of the Teachers' Pensions Agency.

Capita Managed Services and Lusis Business Solutions are not currently bidding for work in any of the other areas.

DEFENCE

Air Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* the Royal Air Force Harrier GR 7 which crashed on 20 February at Southorpe, near Peterborough, Lincolnshire, *(b)* the two RAF Tornados which collided on

10 January above the base at Coningsby, *(c)* the RAF Tornado which crashed on 11 January at RAF Bruggen, Germany and *(d)* the RAF Hawk trainer which crashed on take-off in February at RAF Valley, Anglesey last had a major service; by whom each was carried out; and if he will make a statement. [17914]

Mr. Soames: All RAF aircraft are maintained in accordance with the appropriate authorised servicing cycle and approved maintenance procedures.

In addition to first and second line maintenance carried out at operating units by RAF tradesmen at 125, 250, 500 and 1,000 flying hours, RAF Tornado aircraft undergo a major service every 2,000 flying hours. This is carried out by the Maintenance Group Defence Agency at RAF St. Athan. Neither Tornado F3 ZE862 nor ZE166 had received their first major service, which would have become due at 2,000 flying hours. They had, however, been subject to appropriate levels of servicing in November 1995 and August 1995 respectively. Tornado GR1 ZD846's last major service was carried out in 1991, but it had been appropriately serviced in December 1995.

RAF Hawk aircraft undergo a major service every 2,000 flying hours. Hawk XX164's last major service was performed in 1991 at RAF Abingdon. The aircraft has since then received regular servicing, most recently in January 1996 when minor maintenance was carried out by RAF tradesmen at RAF Valley.

The design philosophy of the Harrier does not require it to undergo major servicing in the same way as the Tornado and Hawk. Harrier GR7 ZG476 completed a period of minor scheduled maintenance, the deepest servicing applicable to the Harrier GR7, at RAF Wittering in December 1995. This work was carried out by RAF tradesmen.

The separate boards of inquiry into these aircraft losses are ongoing. A summary of the board's findings will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the accident and involving a Royal Navy Harrier T 4N at RNAS Yeovilton on 27 June 1994; and if this accident is included in the accident rate figure for Royal Navy fixed-wing aircraft published in the 1995 edition of "UK Defence Statistics". [19759]

Mr. Soames: The circumstances of the accident are as follows. During the final stages of approach for landing, following a general flying practice sortie, the aircraft's rate of descent increased, causing it to land heavily. Subsequent investigation revealed that the aircraft had struck the leading edge of the runway with sufficient force to remove the main undercarriage. Fuller details are given in the "Military Aircraft Accident Summary", copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I can confirm that this accident was included in the accident rate figures for Royal Navy fixed-wing aircraft published in the 1995 edition of "UK Defence Statistics".

Dismissals (Sexuality)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel have been dismissed over the last five years for reasons regarding their sexuality. [19449]

Mr. Soames: During the period 1990–94, 309 service personnel left the armed forces for reasons of their sexual orientation.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19914]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Railhead Transfer Equipment

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions the Arbau-Klaus railhead transfer equipment has been deployed outside the United Kingdom in conjunction with other equipment in the demountable rack offloading and pick-up system logistic supply chain. [19968]

Mr. Soames: The Arbau-Klaus railhead transfer equipment has been deployed in Germany since 1989. It carries out a range of mechanical handling functions and is regularly deployed with a variety of other systems within the demountable rack offloading and pick-up system—DROPS—logistic supply chain.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Arbau-Klaus railhead transfer equipment has required modification for use as part of the demountable rack offloading and pick-up system logistic supply chain since purchased by his Department. [19969]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Arbau-Klaus equipment has not required modification to meet the operational requirement. However, in the current financial year the Ministry of Defence has purchased a further complement of spreader frames to reflect the changed pattern of operational use. This option was provided for in the original contract.

Construction Contract

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the construction contract at Coulport and the role of Tarmac in respect of that contract. [19790]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A number of major construction contracts were placed in the 1980s to prepare the Royal Naval armament depot, Coulport, Scotland for the introduction into service of the Trident strategic weapon system. Two large contracts were awarded to Tarmac Construction Limited as main contractor. One was for the provision of access roads and dockside weapon handling

facilities. The other, for which a final price remains to be agreed, was for warhead and missile storage facilities and warhead processing arrangements.

Military Equipment Sales (Argentina)

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if military equipment made in the United Kingdom was sold to Argentina between May 1979 and May 1982. [18581]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Details of arms sales to Argentina since 1976 were given to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in November 1982. A copy of this—HC31–i—is available in the Library of the House. These figures indicate that, in fulfilment of contracts signed before 1979, two Lynx anti-submarine helicopters were delivered to Argentina in 1979, one type 42 destroyer was commissioned in November 1980 and some Sea Dart missiles were delivered up to 1981.

Nuclear-powered Vessels

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the decommissioned nuclear-powered vessels in the ownership of his Department, giving the location of each and the cost of any work undertaken on each vessel since decommissioning; and what are his plans for the disposal of these vessels. [19510]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The location of each nuclear-powered submarine that has left service is as follows, with the approximate costs, where available, of undertaking the defuelling, de-equipping and lay-up preparation—DDLP. In addition to DDLP costs, the average annual maintenance cost of storing a decommissioned nuclear-powered submarine afloat is some £50,000. A docking of each submarine is also carried out every 10 years at an approximate cost of £3 million per submarine. So far, only Dreadnought has undergone a 10-yearly docking. The policy for final disposal is still under consideration.

Submarine	*Location*	*DDLP cost £ million*
HMS Dreadnought	Rosyth	[1]—
HMS Warspite	Devonport	11.3
HMS Churchill	Rosyth	11.2
HMS Conqueror	Devonport	10.6
HMS Swiftsure	Rosyth	11.5
HMS Courageous	Devonport	10.8
HMS Revenge	Rosyth	18.7
HMS Valiant	Devonport	[2]—
HMS Resolution	Rosyth	[2]—
HMS Renown	Rosyth	[2]—

[1] It is not possible to provide costs of the decommissioning of HMS Dreadnought, which was the first nuclear submarine to be withdrawn from service in 1982; the information, insofar as it may be available, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

[2] HMS Valiant, HMS Resolution and HMS Renown have not yet completed their DDLP.

Atomic Weapons Test Programme (Australasia)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much compensation has been paid since 1966 to the Australian Government or nationals by Her Majesty's Government in respect of claims by or on behalf of persons who suffered death or injury as a consequence of the United Kingdom's atomic weapons test programme in Australasia in the 1950s. [18880]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* As announced to the House on 10 December 1993, *Official Report*, column 421, the Government agreed to make an ex gratia payment of £20 million to the Federal Government of Australia as a contribution to the cost of the further clean-up of the Maralinga site. A copy of the note giving effect to this agreement was placed in the Library of the House. The note also records that the Government of Australia indemnified the Government of the UK against claims from Australian nationals or residents. We understand, however, that since then the Australian Government have paid no compensation to anyone claiming to have been injured by radiation from the British nuclear test programme.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Welsh Grand Committee

Mr. Hain: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission what estimate he has made of the annual cost of the proposed reforms of the Welsh Grand Committee. [18467]

Mr. Beith *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* On the assumption that the Welsh Grand Committee meets four times in Wales during the financial year 1996–97, an estimate of £36,000 is forecast. This estimate includes travel, accommodation, communications, security and additional staff costs; but excludes any additional costs incurred by Government Departments. Full details will be given, in due course, in the next sessional return.

Deregulation Committee

Mr. Steen: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission what is the total estimated cost of maintaining the Deregulation Committee, broken down by office costs, staffing costs and printing costs. [18639]

Mr. Beith *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* It is not possible to give a total estimated cost of maintaining the Deregulation Committee.

Currently the Committee has three full-time staff and three staff who also serve the European Legislation Committee. The Committee also receives assistance from the staff in the Committee Office providing general support for the work of Select Committees. Details of the staffing of the Committees are given in the sessional return. It is not possible to calculate office costs for individual Select Committees. The return for Session 1994–95 was published on 28 February as House of Commons Paper 132 of the current Session.

The cost of printing the reports of the Committee was £2,070 in financial year 1994–95; and in the current year, to the end of December 1995, has been £29,337. The costs relate to publication of nine reports.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contactors. [19461]

Mr. Willetts: My Department has not purchased any computer capacity, in the sense of buying time on someone else's computer, from other Government Departments or the private sector since 1987.

Health and Safety Inspections Leaflet

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what role the deregulation unit had in the preparation of the recently published Health and Safety Commission leaflet entitled "Your rights when health and safety inspectors take enforcement action". [19575]

Mr. Freeman: Officials from the Cabinet Office deregulation unit and the Health and Safety Executive worked together closely in drawing up this leaflet to ensure it followed the enforcement principles in the Deregulation and Contracting out Act 1994.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff are employed by the deregulation unit; what indicators are used to measure its performance; and what are its total annual manning costs. [19572]

Mr. Freeman: Staffing numbers, staffing costs and performance measures were set out in the annual MINIS 95 return for the Department of Trade and Industry, as the unit was at that stage part of that Department. The return was published on 12 June 1995 and a copy placed in the Library of the House.

The staff complement of the deregulation unit at January 1996 was 43.5.

HMSO

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many jobs have been lost in Her Majesty's Stationery Office in each year since 1990; [19776]

(2) what is the projected cost of redundancy payments for HMSO in 1996; [19777]

(3) what is the cost of redundancy payments within HMSO for each year since 1990; [19778]

(4) what estimate he has made of the change in the number of jobs in HMSO in 1996. [19791]

Mr. Freeman: As these questions relate purely to operational matters, I have asked the chief executive of HMSO to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mike Lynn to Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, dated 7 March 1996:

I have been asked by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to reply to your four Parliamentary Questions (Nos 41–44) about job losses and redundancy payments.

I am afraid it is not possible to identify precisely how many jobs have been lost in quite the way you are seeking. HMSO operates in a dynamic environment and has to react to changing market conditions. Accordingly, whilst changes in technology or customer requirements have meant that many operational jobs have been surrendered, we have at the same time needed to recruit sales and marketing staff to ensure that we can compete effectively, and we have moved some staff from support roles into the front line.

Similarly, some jobs have been lost as a result of market tests, but market testing by other Departments has enabled us to capture additional work on a Facilities Management basis, involving the transfer into HMSO of some 230 staff. The net result is that total permanent staffing has fallen from 3,220 at 1.1.90 to 2,696 at 1.3.96, and we expect a further significant decrease by the end of the year.

The total cost of redundancy payments (excluding any pay in lieu of notice, and provision for future annual compensation payments) for each year since 1990 is given below. These figures are recorded against the year in which provision was made in our Annual Accounts and in some cases the actual departures occurred in the following year. In particular, the 1995 figure includes some £8,450,000 in respect of the 1996 programme.

1990: £477,000

1991: £163,000

1992: £1,245,000

1993: £4,789,000

1994: £3,843,000

1995: £15,040,00

1996: —.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Contributions and Benefits Agencies, Scotland

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the number of *(a)* contributions agencies and *(b)* benefits agencies in Scotland. [17106]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Contributions Agency undertook an extensive analysis of its field operations business in 1993 and a review of the management structure in 1994, to increase efficiency and reduce costs, in line with the Government White Paper, "Continuity and change in the Civil Service".

The recommendations of the reviews were subject to a feasibility study and then an extensive trial period in rural and urban areas during 1995.

The proposed changes to the field operations structure will be implemented over a two to three-year period.

Although the efficiency and running costs of the Contributions Agency are constantly under review, there are no proposals to undertake a further reorganisation.

The Benefits Agency regularly reviews its estate.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the number of and access to contributions and benefits agencies. [17107]

Mr. Heald: The Contributions Agency has been in existence since 2 April 1991, details of inquiries made to the Secretary of State about access to, and the number of Contributions Agency offices are not available prior to 1 January 1995. Since 1 January 1995 the Secretary of

State has received 17 direct inquiries on this subject; 16 written inquiries from hon. Members and one independent inquiry.

The Benefits Agency could obtain this information only at disproportionate cost.

Company Pension Schemes

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what incentives he plans to introduce to encourage individuals to contribute to company pension schemes. [18850]

Mr. Heald: Measures to be introduced under the Pensions Act 1995 will enhance the security of occupational pension schemes, increasing pubic confidence in them. Members of occupational schemes contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme pay lower rates of national insurance contributions. Tax relief is given on individual contributions to occupational schemes, including additional voluntary contributions. Similarly, national insurance rebates and tax relief are available to employees in individually-arranged and group personal pension schemes. The Department of Social Security is developing a range of material explaining the benefits of planning early for retirement and providing pensions information in plain English for employers, the public and the pensions world.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19909]

Mr. Burt: Neither Capita Managed Services nor Lusis Business Solutions are part of any of the consortia bidding for any of this Department's facilities management, private finance initiative projects, management buy-outs, contractorisation schemes or market-testing schemes. It is possible that these companies may be employed by bidding consortia, but that is a matter for the consortia concerned.

Cold Weather Payments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for those areas of *(a)* Greenock and *(b)* Port Glasgow within the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow entitled to receive cold weather payments, the weather station used as the basis for calculations; in respect of how many days each area has received cold weather payments in winter 1995–96; what has been the total amount paid to date; and if he will make a statement. [18055]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 7 November 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list for those areas of (a) Greenock and (b) Port Glasgow within the Parliamentary Constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow entitled to receive Cold Weather Payments (CWPs), the weather station used as the basis for calculations; in respect of how many days each area has received CWPs in winter 1995–96; what has been the total amount paid to date; and if he will make a statement.

The information is not available in the format requested. CWP statistics are not kept which are specific to Parliamentary Constituencies or for individual Benefit Offices, but are kept for Benefit Agency (BA) Districts. The BA District Clyde Coast and Cowal comprises of the BA Offices of Greenock and Port Glasgow and covers the postal codes: KA25, KA28 to KA30 inclusive, PA11 and PA13 to PA27 inclusive. This District is linked to the weather station at Glasgow Airport.

The weather station at Glasgow Airport has had 21 days of identified cold weather. The total amount of CWPs paid from December 1995 to date is £231,854.50. Statistics are not yet available for any clerical payments which may have been made in February by the District.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which weather stations are used as the basis of calculations for cold weather payments in the constituency of Perth and Kinross; for how many days each eligible area has received cold weather payments in winter 1995–96; and what has been the total amount paid. [19168]

Mr. Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 7 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about which weather stations in the Parliamentary constituency of Perth and Kinross were used to calculate Cold Weather Payments (CWPs), how many days each eligible area received CWPs in winter 1995–96, and the total amount paid.

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because statistics are not kept which are specific to Parliamentary constituencies but are kept by Benefit Agency Districts. The constituency of Perth and Kinross is dealt with by the Agency's Tayside District. Postal codes within the District are linked to weather stations at Aberdeen Airport, Aviemore, Edinburgh Airport and Leuchars. Details of the postal codes which are linked to each weather station are available in the Library.

The weater station at Aberdeen Airport has had 21 days of identified Cold Weather, Aviemore has had 42 days, Edinburgh Airport has had 14 days and Leuchars has had 21 days.

This winter, to date, Tayside District has made CWPs amounting to £535,568. This does not include any clerical payments which may have been made by the District in February as these details are not yet available.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Income Support

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action is being taken by his Department to minimise the variations in monetary errors made in the award of income support by differing Benefits Agency offices. [18041]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter form Peter Mathison to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 8 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what action is being taken by his Department to minimise the variations in monetary errors made in the award of Income Support (IS) by differing Benefits Agency offices.

The BA has a continuing programme of action to improve IS accuracy and minimise monetary errors. These include increasing the level of mandatory checks in local offices, redesigning training material and introducing refresher training workshops. The BA has also set up a team to carry out a fundamental review of IS processes.

To help individual offices identify error trends and training needs we have set up Quality Support Teams who visit every District at least once a year to give advice and support and spread good practices. Additionally, Territorial Teams have carried out Management Reviews in offices where performance is not reaching the standards set.

One of the main reasons for variation in office performance is the number of mortgage cases dealt with by each office. Mortgage cases are by far the most complex because of the many differing types of loans, the complexity of the regulations and the frequency of interest changes. The BA scrutinised all mortgage cases in 1994 and has recently implemented a change in legislation, from October 1995, to standardise the treatment of eligible interest costs. As a result of the change less clerical input is required and therefore the opportunity for error is reduced.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19906]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Neither company is currently bidding under any of *(a)* to *(e)*.

Magistrates, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will take steps to eliminate age discrimination in respect of those aged over 50 in advertisements to recruit magistrates in Doncaster. [18823]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The intention of the advertisement is not to be discriminatory but the Lord Chancellor's advisory committees seek to maintain a balance on benches in terms of age. Of the 185 magistrates currently on the Doncaster bench, 73 per cent. are aged 50 and above.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of justices of the peace aged *(a)* under 30, *(b)* 30 to 40, *(c)* 40 to 50, *(d)* 50 to 60, *(e)* 60 to 65 and *(f)* over 65 years of age for Doncaster magistrates court. [18822]

Mr. Evans: The figures are as follows:

	Number
(a) under 30	0
(b) 30 to 40	6
(c) 40 to 50	43
(d) 50 to 60	86
(e) 60 to 65	27
(f) over 65	23

Juries

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will amend section 8 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 to allow research to be undertaken into the functioning of juries. [18777]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The royal commission on criminal justice recommended the amendment of section 8 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 to enable research to be conducted into jurors' reasons for their verdicts. The Government are sympathetic to this recommendation and recognise the significant potential value of some forms of jury research. Consultation is currently taking place and the senior judiciary have been asked for their views.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the statistical probability of an eligible individual being called for jury service. [18773]

Mr. Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 8 March 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your question about jury service.

I regret that the information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Arts Councils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the level of co-operation between the Scottish arts council and the Northern Ireland arts council; what projects have been jointly funded in the last year; and what future joint projects are planned. [17109]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Regular meetings and discussions are held between the chairmen, chief executive and other senior staff, as appropriate, to discuss matters of common interest. In the last year the four UK Arts Councils and the Arts Council in the Republic of Ireland funded a five cities tour of poetry readings in December 1995, and the Scottish arts council and the arts council of Northern Ireland jointly commissioned from Piers Hellawell a musical composition for the Highland festival in June 1996.

Live Births

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many live births were registered in Scotland during 1995. [18861]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provisional total of live births registered in Scotland in 1995 is £60,053.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what civil servants attended each meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in the current parliamentary Session; what have been the total costs associated with their attendance on each occasion; and how many of them were from the Scottish information office; [18568]

(2) what civil servants he proposes should attend future meetings of the Scottish Grant Committee; what estimate he has made of the total cost involved; and how many of the officials and what amount of the costs relate to staff of the Scottish information office. [18569]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of officials attending meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee depends on the subjects for debate. In the current parliamentary Session an average of 15 departmental officials have attended each meeting. That number includes three officials from the Scottish Office information directorate and four ministerial private secretaries. As officials attending meetings do so as part of their normal duties no additional staff costs are incurred. There are of course travelling costs associated with each meetings.

Attendance at future meetings will depend on the business to be handled and travelling costs on the venue but I expect the same pattern will continue.

Pupil Exclusions

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many school children were excluded *(a)* permanently and *(b)* temporarily from schools in (i) Perth and Kinross district council area and (ii) Tayside regional council area in 1995. [19169]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information on the number of school children excluded temporarily from schools is not available. The available information, consistent with that set out in the report on attendance and absence in Scottish schools, 1994–95, published by the adult unit of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools, is as follows.

	Number of pupils permanently excluded from schools in 1994–95	*Number of half days of temporary exclusions from schools in 1994–95*
Perth and Kinross	0	3,956
Tayside	0	20,702

Racism in Schools

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many racial incidents were reported in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each educational authority in Scotland in 1995. [19170]

Mr. Robertson: This information is not held centrally by the Scottish Office.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which education authorities in Scotland have specific programmes to deal directly with the incidence of racism in schools. [19171]

Mr. Robertson: The management of schools is the responsibility of education authorities and head teachers. Information on which education authorities in Scotland have specific programmes to deal directly with the incidence of racism in schools is not held by the Scottish Office.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19900]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Neither of these companies is currently involved in biding for any of these schemes or initiatives within the Scottish Office.

Education Directorates

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are *(a)* the numbers employed in the education directorate of each of the new councils, *(b)* the numbers of schools for which each is responsible and *(c)* the ratio for each council of the numbers so employed to the number of schools for which it is responsible. [20383]

Mr. Kynoch: The information at present available is shown in the table. I am asking my officials to update these figures as soon as councils have finalised their staffing structures.

New Scottish Councils: numbers employed in educational directorates and numbers of schools

	Officers[1]	*Schools*[2]	*Ratio*
Aberdeen	16	95	1:6
Aberdeenshire	31	196	1:6
Angus	11	65	1:6
Borders	32	82	1:2.5
Clackmannan	8	29	1:3.5
Dumfries and Galloway	19	134	1:7
Dundee	14	65	1:4.5
East Lothian	21	48	1:2.2
East Renfrewshire	11	36	1:3
Edinburgh	63	158	1:2.5
Falkirk	17	67	1:4
Fife	45	192	1:4.2
Midlothian	10	51	1:5
Moray	16	64	1:4
Perth and Kinross	14	92	1:6.5
Renfrewshire	14	88	1:6

New Scottish Councils: numbers employed in educational directorates and numbers of schools

	Officers[1]	*Schools*[2]	*Ratio*
South Ayrshire	17	65	1:4
West Lothian	41	92	1:2.2

[1] Officers comprise Director (Tier 1), Deputy/Assisted Director (Tier 2), Education Officer/Operations Manager (Tier 3) and Adviser/Quality Assessor/Development Officer (Tier 4).

[2] Schools comprise secondary schools, primary schools special schools nursery schools.

1. Information from the following eleven councils is awaited: Argyll and Bute, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, Glasgow, Highlands, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling and West Dunbartonshire.

Local Authority Expenses

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are *(a)* the number of councillors, *(b)* the number of special responsibility allowances being paid, *(c)* the total cost of these allowances, *(d)* the cost per councillor and *(e)* the number of administrative staff earning in excess of £42,000 in respect of each of the new local authorities. [20384]

Mr. Kynoch: The information, as supplied by the councils and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, is shown in the table:

New councils—special responsibility allowances (SRAs) and numbers of administrative staff earning in excess of £42,000

Council	*Number of councillors*	*Number of SRAs*	*Cost*	*Cost per councillor*	*Number of staff earning in excess of £42,000*
Aberdeen	50	28	251,095	5,022	17
Aberdeenshire[1]	47	9	84,565	1,799	19
Angus	26	25	184,800	7,108	28
Argyll and Bute	33	15	125,450	3,802	13
Scottish Borders	58	19	118,700	2,047	13
Clackmannan	12	10	75,660	6,305	14
Dumfries and Galloway	70	36	244,837	3,497	39
Dundee	36	24	200,000	5,556	32
East Ayrshire	30	17	143,500	4,783	27
East Dunbartonshire	26	16	161,000	6,192	24
East Lothian	18	16	138,500	7,694	11
East Renfrewshire	20	14	113,125	5,656	23
Edinburgh	58	55	405,450	6,991	54
Falkirk	36	25	231,275	6,424	35
Fife	92	50	395,200	4,296	74
Glasgow	83	58	396,500	4,777	65
Highlands	72	54	253,794	3,525	24
Inverclyde	20	15	196,950	9,847	18
Midlothian	15	14	125,625	8,375	11
Moray	18	15	159,375	8,854	8
North Ayrshire	29	27	242,874	8,096	21
North Lanarkshire	69	30	264,800	3,838	38
Perth and Kinross	32	22	201,000	6,300	16
Renfrewshire	40	17	126,209	3,155	29
South Ayrshire	25	18	161,700	6,468	24
South Lanarkshire	73	49	419,760	5,672	43
Stirling	22	22	135,625	6,165	12
West Dunbartonshire	22	12	120,250	5,466	13
West Lothian	27	22	250,125	9,264	19

[1] Subject to further revision to reflect proposed area structures.

WALES

Welsh Economic Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column 59, on what date he sought the view of local authorities on the future of the Welsh Economic Council; what other bodies he has consulted on the WEC's future; if he will give details; and if he will make a statement. [17349]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 27 February 1996]:* I consulted the local authorities on 20 November on their views on the future of the Welsh Economic Council. I also refer the hon. Member to my announcement in the House on 29 February, *Official Report*, columns 1024–98.

Buildings (Flintshire)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to meet the new Flintshire county council to discuss repairs and improvements to new buildings. [18920]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

North Wales Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet the North Wales TEC to discuss the consequences of job losses at *(a)* Raytheon jets and *(b)* British Aerospace at Broughton, Clwyd. [18925]

Mr. Hague: My Department is keeping in close touch with the employment position in the aerospace industry in north-east Wales. I have no current plans to meet the local training and enterprise council.

Development Area Status

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of the loss of development area status on those constituencies which have lost such status; and if he will make a statement. [18927]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Regional selective assistance is evaluated regularly. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy told the Trade and Industry Committee on 18 October 1995, another evaluation is to start this year.

In the meantime, the Welsh Office has been monitoring the volume of RSA applications. The introduction of the new map in August 1993 caused a rush of applications immediately prior to the expiry of the old map. This makes it difficult to identify trends at present. The Welsh Office will continue to monitor applications as this distortion becomes less important.

In the travel-to-work areas all or part of which lost development area status in 1993, average unemployment in the 12 months to January 1996 was 20.4 per cent. below that in the 12 months to July 1993 compared with a fall of 18.3 per cent. in Wales as a whole.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the reductions in expenditure that will be made in each of the next 10 years as a result of the reorganisation of local government in Wales, on the basis of extrapolated past costs. [19284]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is for councils to decide how much they spend. The level of savings from the reorganisation will depend on their decisions. My right hon. Friend will take this decision on the level of total standard spending for 1997–98 as part of the forthcoming public expenditure round.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *395*, if he will place a copy of his letter to the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation in the Library. [19917]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a confidential communication with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation. It would not be appropriate for a copy to be placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the foreign currency borrowings by NHS trusts in Wales; and if he will list the dates on which his approval was *(a)* sought and *(b)* given for such borrowings. [19915]

Mr. Hague: My approval has not been sought by any NHS trust in Wales to engage in foreign currency borrowing.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the borrowings by NHS trusts in Wales from persons other than the Secretary of State; and what amounts are outstanding. [19837]

Mr. Hague: All loans taken out by NHS trusts in Wales have been obtained from the Exchequer. To facilitate short-term cash management, I have approved bank overdraft guarantees to enable the following trusts to borrow up to the amounts shown.

NHS Trust	*Amount* £
Llandough Hospital and Community	100,000
Bridgend and District	250,000
Gwynedd Community	100,000
Llanelli/Dinefwr	250,000
Glan Clwyd District General Hospital	100,000

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19901]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information about bidders for Welsh Office contracts is commercially confidential.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications he has received for total fundholding; in which health authority they are located; how many he has approved; what is the total annual fund budget in each case; and how many patients are on the lists of the practices concerned. [19916]

Mr. Hague: Eight proposals were received for projects to test the development of total purchasing by GP fundholders, of which four have been approved.

Two projects, involving approximately 50,000 patients each, are in Gwent. Both the new Morgannwg and Dyfed health authority areas will include one project covering about 20,000 patients in each case.

The purchasing budgets for these projects have not yet been set. These will be agreed between the health authorities and the fundholding practices involved.

Sea Empress Incident

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to assist local authorities who have expended resources on the Sea Empress disaster clean-up and will not qualify for compensation from the existing industry compensation funds. [19786]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: All local authorities involved in the clean-up operation are qualified to claim reimbursement of costs incurred form the ship's insurers and the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Allason: To ask the Attorney-General how many public interest immunity certificates are current in *(a)* civil cases and *(b)* criminal cases. [18810]

The Attorney-General: On the basis of the information available, which relates only to cases involving Government Departments, there are known to be *(a)* two civil cases[1] and *(b)* seven criminal cases currently before the courts in which public interest immunity certificates have been signed.

[1]Includes one PII claim made by affidavit.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19902]

The Attorney-General: None.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Study

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times and upon what subjects he has asked KPMG to undertake a study for his Department since 1 January 1995. [18816]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department has let four contracts centrally with KPMG for external consultancy since 1 January 1995. The subjects of these studies were:

Study into the North American service sector;

Study of outward investment;

Post Office performance review—operational efficiency;

National Grid Flotation—Share option and dividend issues.

In addition, one contract, for a job evaluation exercise, was let by the former executive agency, the National Engineering Laboratory.

I have asked the chief executives of the existing agencies to reply separately.

Letter from Adrian Wilson to Mr. John Battle, dated 8 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question: 95/1413 with regard to how many times and upon what subjects KPMG have been asked to undertake a study for the Department of Trade and Industry since 1 January 1995.

We have one such contract with KPMG, in respect of Human Resources Computer System.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. John Battle, dated 6 March 1996:

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade about the frequency and subjects of study undertaken by KPMG for his Department. I have been asked to reply in respect of Companies House Executive Agency.

KPMG have not undertaken any studies for this Agency since 1 January 1995.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. John Battle, dated 8 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the use of KPMG to undertake studies for The Insolvency Service since 1 January 1995.

I confirm that KPMG have not been asked to undertake any study for The Service since that date.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. John Battle, dated 8 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply for the Patent Office to your question about how many times, and upon what subjects KPMG has been asked to undertake a study since January 1 1995. The Patent Office had no such dealings with KPMG in that period.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. John Battle, dated 8 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about studies undertaken by KPMG.

KPMG have undertaken no study for this Agency in the period since 1 January 1995.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. John Battle, dated 8 March 1996:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about KPMG. I can confirm that the Radiocommunications Agency have not asked KPMG to undertake any studies since 1 January 1995.

Redundancies

Mr. Burden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what circumstances employers are required to notify his Department of proposed redundancies. [19970]

Mr. John M. Taylor: An employer proposing to dismiss as redundant 20 or more employees at one establishment within a period of 90 days or less is required, under section 193 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 as amended by the Collective Redundancies and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Amendment) Regulations 1995, to notify the Secretary of State of that proposal in writing.

Iraq (Military Equipment)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he possesses on the role of *(a)* Apremont S.A. Company of Panama, *(b)* Muiden Chemie Company of the Netherlands, *(c)* GEA Company, Remie Ltd. and Erber Ltd. of Italy, *(d)* SPEL Company of Portugal and *(e)* Banco Nazionale del Lavoro in facilitating the export of United Kingdom-origin military equipment to Iraq since 1985. [18535]

Mr. Lang: Muiden Chemie Company of the Netherlands and SPEL company of Portugal feature in chapter E7 of Sir Richard Scott's report. There is also a reference to the Atlanta, Georgia branch of the Banco Nazionale del Lavoro in paragraph A1.3 of the report. I understand that Sir Richard Scott intends to publish shortly on CD-ROM as many of the source documents for report as he considers necessary.

So far as can be ascertained my Department has no further information concerning the role of the companies mentioned in the hon. Gentleman's question in facilitating the export of United Kingdom origin military equipment to Iraq.

If the hon. Gentleman has any additional information suggesting that a breach of UK export controls has been committed, he should inform HM Customs.

Domestic Gas (Standing Charges)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what restrictions are placed on the levying of standing charges by companies supplying gas to domestic consumers. [19818]

Mr. Eggar: In general, it will be for gas suppliers competing in the domestic market to make their own judgments as to standing charges and for customers to take them into account in their choice of supplier. Prospective suppliers operating in the south-west are generally offering standing charges lower than those of British Gas and two are offering a standing charge of zero.

British Gas remains subject to a standing charge cap, equal in real terms to the level at privatisation.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sport

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made on implementing the initiatives set out in the policy statement "Sport: Raising the Game". [20382]

Mr. Sproat: Since the publication of the statement last July, the Department of National Heritage, the Department for Education and Employment, the Sports Council and other organisations have been working on the implementation of its initiatives. Already, significant progress has been made in a number of areas.

In schools, a revised physical education curriculum with greater emphasis on team games was introduced in August 1995.

The Department of Education and Employment is consulting on the inclusion of information on sporting aims, provision and achievements in annual reports and prospectuses, with a view to implementation from the 1996–97 academic year.

The new Office for Standards in Education framework for inspection will ensure that inspectors will look at team games and sport as well as PE in the national curriculum as part of all school inspections.

The Ofsted survey of good practice in school PE and sport was published in December, and a summary was sent to all schools in January 1996.

Ofsted is also carrying out an audit of initial teacher training for PE. Its report is due in the summer, and will assist with the development of performance indicators.

The Department for Education and Employment has also carried out a survey of sporting provision in schools, the results of which are expected in April. In addition, the Sports Council has distributed 35,000 copies of its "Why PE" leaflet to support the PE profession.

The responses to the consultation paper published in July on the sportsmark and gold star award schemes, which was sent to all secondary schools, have been analysed. The Sports Council is now preparing detailed guidance on the implementation and assessment of both schemes. The aim is to have the schemes up and running in secondary schools in the 1996–97 academic year and in primary schools, following a further consultation exercise, in the 1997–98 academic year.

The Sports Council's working group on coaching schemes has been set up and will report in April.

The Sports Council is also carrying out audits of available governing body courses and on the number of teachers working on primary and secondary education.

The Department for Education and Employment has consulted on the playing fields elements of the Education (School Premises) Regulations being retained and the regulations were laid in February.

In addition, the Department of the Environment issued a consultation paper on 15 January on the Sports Council becoming a statutory consultee on all planning applications affecting playing fields. Comments were invited by 15 March.

In order to stimulate more good quality lottery applications from schools, the Sports Council provided additional information and advice via publications and roadshows in November.

The council will identify gaps in provision through a facilities planning model, and has produced new guidelines for deprived areas. Funding levels have also been raised to 90 per cent. for these areas. A progress report will be produced shortly and action begun in April 1996. The Department of National Heritage has also sent leaflets to all schools in the UK providing information on how they can benefit from lottery funds. The Institute of Sports Sponsorship is consulting the Department for Education and Employment on ways of promoting greater business sponsorship of school sport.

The working group on university sports scholarships, which is being chaired by Sir Roger Bannister, commenced work in October, has been meeting regularly, and will report in April.

The Sports Council's consultation paper, setting out what the structure and content of the British Academy of Sport might be, was published on 5 December. The closing date for responses was 31 January and an analysis of these is currently being carried out by independent consultants on behalf of the council. Once the structure and content of the academy have been agreed, bids will be invited to establish the academy. The aim is to invite bids in the spring.

The Sports Council has also met the Sports Aid Foundation, British Olympic Association and British Paralympic Association to discuss the co-ordination of support for elite athletes. In addition, the Secretary of State has written to the Sports Council proposing changes to the way in which sports lottery money is distributed. The proposals include helping talented young people, including elite sports people, to develop their skills.

Between now and July, progress will be made on several other action points, including: from April, the Sports Council will be allocating an additional £1 million to provide opportunities for teachers to gain coaching qualifications. Priorities will be decided by the council's coaching working group. The council is also considering

the details of the £2 million fund for promoting links between schools and clubs. Sportsmatch will also be earmarking £1 million for schools projects from April.

In April, the Sports Council's national junior sports programme which is being run in conjunction with the Youth Sport Trust will commence. The programme is designed to provide around 4 million children with sports equipment, qualified coaches and places to play. The scheme will cost around £12 million over three years with £7.7 million of lottery money being made available, £2 million to £3 million of grant-in-aid from the Sports Council and some private sector funding. British Telecom has already announced that it will be sponsoring the programme with a total of £750,000 over three years.

The regional offices of the new Sports Council for England will be introducing programmes to improve school-club links in April. Also in April the Sports Council will be publishing revised planning guidelines for governing bodies with a strengthened section on youth sport, which will further encourage the promotion of school-club links.

The Further Education Funding Council is currently drafting a report on sporting provision in the FE sector, which will be published in the next few months. Further education institutions will also publish details of their sporting facilities and the sporting opportunities available to their students from the 1996–97 academic year. The Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals and the Standing Conference of Principals are recommending to their members that higher education institutions should publish details of the sporting facilities and the sporting opportunities available to their students from the 1996–97 academic year.

The Sports Council is giving advice to governing bodies on planning, including planning for youth sport, and its grant assessment panel is assessing these plans with particular attention to governing bodies having targets for athlete support. An improved monitoring system will be in place by April 1996 which will give more detailed information on governing body performance. The council is also drawing up new governing body planning guidelines with special reference to provision for youth sport.

I am pleased that various governing bodies have recently produced programmes for the improvement of their sport and to increase sporting opportunities:

(i) the Football League has designated this season as "School Year" and aims to strengthen links between member clubs and their local schools through, for example, a competition for secondary schools organised by local league clubs, sponsored by Auto Windscreens with matching funding from the £1 million Sportsmatch has set aside for schools projects;

(ii) the Lawn Tennis Association's plan for the development of tennis in Great Britain 1996 to 2001 which looks at the part which the LTA, its county associations, clubs, schools, further and higher education institutions and local authorities can play in expanding participation in tennis, encouraging regular competition in the game and, ultimately, producing world-class tennis players;

(iii) the Rugby Football Union's review of student rugby which aims to encourage maximum participation by students in rugby union;

(iv) the Football Associations of England, Wales and Scotland have also combined on the Coca-Cola Football Crazy initiative which is making available professional coaching and skills training to around 300,000 children and is free to all.

A follow-up policy statement, to be published in July, will report progress on all action points from "Sport: Raising the Game" and on new initiatives following on from them, as well as other relevant new initiatives.

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list all cases since 1987 in which his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19462]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage has never bought computer capacity, either from other Departments or from the private sector.

Sport (Drugs)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much money the Government have spent in conducting drug tests on sportsmen and women in each year since 1979. [19316]

Mr. Sproat: From April 1988, when the Sports Council's doping control unit was established, until March 1995 a total of £5,261,778 has been spent on anti-doping activities, including £4,951,828 on testing. The sports councils in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland contributed a total of £667,773.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to receive from the Sports Council statistics as to the number of sportsmen and women who failed drug tests in 1995. [19318]

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council will be publishing a report on doping control activities from 1995–96 by early June.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* the number of drug tests carried out on sportsmen and women, *(b)* the number of sportsmen and women who failed drug tests and *(c)* the drugs that those who failed the tests were found to be abusing in each year since 1979. [19313]

Mr. Sproat: Between 1988, when the Sports Council's doping control unit was set up, and April 1995, 26,869 tests have been carried out on sportsmen and women of many nationalities participating in sport in the United Kingdom or UK sportsmen and women training abroad. There have been 357 substances found, and 58 refusals to be tested. The number of reports to the governing bodies of sport for consideration as doping offences would be lower, as in some cases more than one substance has been detected in a sample. Action taken by various governing bodies is monitored by the Sports Council.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much extra money the Government have made available to the Sports Council to fulfil the pledges in "Sport: Raising the Game" to provide additional emphasis on educating young sportsmen and women about the dangers of drug abuse. [19315]

Mr. Sproat: Government grant-in-aid to the Sports Council is not earmarked for specific purposes. However in 1996–97, £80,000 will be made available for education and information programmes by the Sports Council under the doping control programme.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much money the Government have spent on educating sportsmen and women on the dangers of drug abuse in each year since 1979. [19317]

Mr. Sproat: Between 1988, when the independent testing programme was established, and March 1995, £309,950 has been spent on education and information programmes.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take as a result of the finding of the Scott inquiry that the letter written to the hon. Member referred to in paragraph D4.26 concerning changes in the Government's policy on the supply of arms to Iraq was misleading. [16951]

Mrs. Clywd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take as a result of the finding of the Scott inquiry that the letter written to the hon. Member referred to in paragraph D4.27 concerning changes in the Government's policy on the supply of arms to Iraq was misleading. [16952]

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report,* column *256,* to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and pursuant to paragraph D4.62 of the Scott report, what steps he has taken to contact the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. Members for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) and for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in respect of the findings of Sir Richard Scott that the answers given to those hon. Members were inadequate and misleading. [17871]

Mr. Hanley: We continue to take the view that the Howe guidelines were not changed. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary does not consider that further action is necessary.

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has anything to add to the answer given to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), on 9 December 1992, *Official Report,* column *663,* on changes made in guidelines covering defence-related exports to Iraq since 1979. [18537]

Mr. Hanley: No.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Security Council resolutions which preclude the release of interest from frozen Iraqi assets in the United Kingdom to produce money to compensate claimants. [18512]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* None of the United Nations Security Council resolutions concerning Iraq provide for the interest on funds in frozen Iraqi accounts in the United Kingdom to be made available by the Government to meet the claims of UK nationals against Iraq.

As required by the provisions of UNSCR 778, all funds in the UK representing the proceeds of the sale of Iraqi petroleum or petroleum products, paid for on or after 6 August 1990, have been transferred to the United Nations' escrow account provided for in UNSCRs 706 and 712. Under SCR 778, sequestrated funds are net of any amounts needed to meet third party rights over such funds existing at the time of its adoption. Funds in the UN escrow account are available to the UN Compensation Commission—UNCC—for meeting the costs of compensation arising out of the Gulf war. They are also available for meeting the costs of UN activities and humanitarian relief. The relevant UNSCRs do not make provision for the Government to have access to these funds or interest on them for the purpose of meeting claims by UK nationals against Iraq other than through the mechanism of the UNCC.

British Council

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on British economic and trade interests resulting from the closure of operations by the British Council in some countries following the reductions in its budget; [19604]

(2) if he discussed with the British Council the effects of the total closure of activities in some countries, and the closure of branch offices and libraries elsewhere following the reductions in its grant funding over the next three years; and if he will make a statement; [19605]

(3) what progress is being made to alleviate the impact of the reduction in the FCO grants in aid to the British Council. [19615]

Mr. Hanley: The council and its board, of which the hon. Lady is a member, are considering how best to adjust their programme and activities to the financial allocations announced in the 1995 budget. The council intends to alleviate the impact of reductions in grant in aid in various ways including through efficiency savings. We will carefully assess proposals made by the council with a view to ensuring that these have the least possible impact on overall British interests.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what work his Department will carry out on deregulation issues in the run-up to the intergovernmental conference. [18643]

Mr. David Davis *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* The deregulation unit of the Cabinet Office is the lead Government Department on deregulation issues. Its work is fully supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Government are committed to improving European regulatory systems and reducing the regulatory burden of European law. Not all this work requires treaty change, and most of it will continue outside the IGC.

Vegetables (Nitrate)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current status of negotiations on the European Commission proposals on nitrate in vegetables. [20381]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The draft Commission regulation on nitrate in lettuce and spinach was discussed at the European Commission's Standing Committee for Foodstuffs on 20 February. During those discussions the United Kingdom indicated that it would, reluctantly, support the Commission's latest proposal—Doc VI/3080/93 Rev 7.

The UK objects to the principle of this legislation, deeming it unnecessary and lacking in scientific justification. However, there is considerable weight of opinion across the EU for various reasons in favour of legislation in this area. For this reason we have been negotiating with the Commission for a number of years to secure an arrangement that is satisfactory for UK interests and that will allow our growers to harvest and market their excellent and healthy produce. As a result of our pressure, allied to considerable assistance from the NFU and growers, we have secured significant concessions from the Commission which will enable British growers to continue production.

I have taken the view that these hard fought gains should not be put at risk by continuing to oppose the Commission, particularly given the uncertainty over the voting intentions of other member states. I believe that the current proposal represents the best possible outcome for the UK given the determination of the Commission and other member states to introduce legislation in this area. However, we made it clear that we would not countenance any diminution of the considerable concessions that we have secured to date. We will maintain this negotiating position until the regulation is formally adopted.

HEALTH

Mr. Robert Cooper

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the resignation of Mr. Robert Cooper, former head of the financial development unit at the NHS executive. [17951]

Mr. Malone: I shall write to the hon. Member.

GP Fundholders

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what audit controls are in place to check public moneys allocated to general practitioners involved in total fundholding; [18046]

(2) what controls are in place to ensure that money allocated to general practitioners involved in total fundholding is not used to improve the property value of medical premises form which doctors may obtain personal financial benefits; [18040]

(3) what is the amount so far allocated to general practitioners involved int total fundholding. [18058]

Mr. Malone: Total purchasing pilots operate under devolved purchasing arrangements from health authorities and are subject to the same rules and audit controls as health authorities. Resource allocation is an important element in the three-year evaluation of the pilots. Resources are allocated according to locally-agreed methodologies governed by criteria such as historical activity, demography, epidemiology and other local factors. Detailed information about allocations is not therefore collected centrally.

Pharmacists' Pay

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish the correspondence between the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee and his Department, concerning the time scale for 100 per cent. payment for prescriptions; [18458]

(2) if he plans to implement the recommendation in the Pharmacists Review Panel 1994 report, that pharmacists should be paid by the NHS at the time at which they have to pay their suppliers; and if he will make a statement. [18429]

Mr. Malone: Letters, or the relevant extracts therefrom, between the Department and the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee relating to the timetable for pharmacists' pay since December 1994 have been placed in the Library. We continue to explore the pharmacists' concerns about the present payment arrangements.

Information Technology

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for the more efficient use of information technology within the NHS. [18794]

Mr. Horam: A national information management and technology strategy for the national health service is being implemented. A major component of the strategy is achieving a common information management and technology infrastructure, which will enable more efficient communication and processing of information within and between NHS organisations, in a secure and controlled environment.

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what qualifications to the NHS accounts for 1993–94 were due to alleged or actual irregular payments by Yorkshire regional health authority; [19026]

(2) how many alleged irregular payments from the Yorkshire regional health authority, to whom, and for what amounts, have been investigated in the last five years; and what has been the result of these investigations; [19024]

(3) what conclusions he has reached on the NHS executive report into alleged irregular payments by the Yorkshire regional health authority; [19028]

(4) if he will publish the NHS executive report into the alleged irregular payments received by Mr. Keith McLean and Mr. David Martin of the Yorkshire regional health authority; [19023]

(5) how many people, and of what grade, were investigated by the NHS executive over alleged irregular payments by the Yorkshire regional health authority; which of these people are still employed by the NHS; and in what capacity; [19027]

(6) what action has been taken within the last three years by *(a)* the Yorkshire regional health authority, *(b)* the NHS executive and *(c)* his Department to recover irregular payments made by the Yorkshire regional health authority; and what disciplinary action has been taken, or is proposed against (i) the recipients and (ii) the authorisers of such payments; [19025]

(7) what is the total amount of money paid out under the irregular payment scheme operated by the Yorkshire regional health authority; how much of this has so far been recovered; and what action is being taken to recover the remainder. [19029]

Mr. Horam: The report of the inquiry into matters raised by the district auditor on the former Yorkshire regional health authority has been provided to the National Audit Office. I understand that it will be published shortly.

Gender Identity Disorder

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many United Kingdom citizens have been treated surgically for gender identity disorder in each of the last five years *(a)* on the NHS and *(b)* privately. [19271]

Mr. Horam: The number of combined operations for sexual transformation as reported in finished consultant episodes in national health service hospitals for the last five years are shown in the table. Information on operations carried out in the private sector is not available centrally. Responsibility for the NHS in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for by right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Year	*Combined operations for sexual transformation*
1990–91	38
1991–92	27
1992–93	43
1993–94	20
1994–95[1]	13

Note:
[1] 1994–95 figures are provisional.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics.

Factor 8

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received, and from whom, concerning the VAT status of recombinant factor 8 and plasma-derived factor 8. [19566]

Mr. Horam: My Department has received six representations—principally—about the value added tax status of factor 8 since September 1995. Three were from hon. Members writing on behalf of constituents, one from the Haemophilia Society, one from a clinician and one from a member of the public. In addition, three parliamentary questions have been asked on the subject. VAT is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Coronary Heart Disease

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards "The Health of the Nation" targets on coronary heart disease and strokes in people *(a)* under 65 years and *(b)* aged 65 to 74 years. [19561]

Mr. Horam: Coronary heart disease mortality fell by 10.7 per cent. in the under 65-year-olds and by 7.7 per cent. in those aged 65 to 74 years between 1993 and 1994. During the same time period stroke mortality fell by 5.6 per cent. for those under 65 and by 3.8 per cent. for those aged 65 to 74.

Cancer

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the recommendations of the "Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services" report have been accepted by his Department; which have been implemented; which have been rejected; and what action he proposes to take on the remaining recommendations. [19513]

Mr. Horam: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has accepted the recommendations in "Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services". Further guidance is being issued on the developing process of implementation and substantive changes to the delivery of cancer services are expected in 1997–98. Health authorities and trusts are already working together to develop local strategies and making preliminary steps in designating cancer units and cancer centres to provide specialised services for cancer care.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the additional revenue from limiting free prescriptions to those on income support. [19322]

Mr. Malone: No such estimates have been made.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18644]

Mr. Horam: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

General Medical Services Council

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters sent by the General Medical Services Committee, details of which have been sent to him. [18977]

Mr. Malone: I reply promptly to letters I receive from the General Medical Services Committee. I know, however, that there is ongoing correspondence which is yet to be concluded.

Human Embryos

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many human embryos were used in treatment cycles from 1991 to 1994. [19787]

Mr. Horam: As recorded in the records of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the number of embryos used in treatment cycles between 1991 and 1994 was 140,410. This includes fresh and frozen embryos.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many human embryos were destroyed between 1991 and 1994 at the request of their parents. [19788]

Mr. Horam: The number of embryos that were not frozen or used for treatment or for other purposes during the period in question was 90,756. As required by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 decisions about these embryos would have been taken only with the consent of the couple involved.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19904]

Mr. Horam: There are none.

TRANSPORT

Road Maintenance (Funding)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what sum of money was transferred from revenue to capital in 1992–93 for structural maintenance on local authority roads in 1996–97; and for what reason the money was transferred. [19771]

Mr. Norris: A total of £100 million. The transfer reflected the importance the Government attached to the condition of local authority principal roads.

Foreign Aircraft

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the countries for which permission has been granted for aircraft to operate by his Department. [19082]

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom has agreements with the following countries, in addition to those of the European Economic Area, for the operation of air services:

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Azerbaijan
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belarus
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Cameroon
Canada
Chile
China
Colombia
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
Estonia
Ethiopia
Fiji
Gabon
Gambia
Georgia
Ghana
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Iran
Israel
Ivory Coast
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Korea (South)
Kuwait
Kyrgyzstan
Latvia
Lebanon
Liberia
Lithuania
Macedonia
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Myanmar (Burma)
Mexico
Moldova
Morocco
Namibia
Nepal
New Zealand

Nigeria
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovak Republic
Slovenia
South Africa
Sri Lanka
St. Lucia
Sudan
Switzerland
Syria
Tajikistan
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Turkmenistan
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
United States of America
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Venezuela
Vietnam
Yemen
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe.

In addition to these, the Department of Transport has issued permits to the airlines of Rwanda, Swaziland and Taiwan for the operation of air services to the United Kingdom.

Late Trains

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate how much money Railtrack has saved by cancelling timetabled services to avoid compensation payments for a delayed service. [19244]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack has agreed contracts with train operating companies to pay compensation for any cancellations of timetabled services. I understand from Railtrack that penalties have been set with the intention of ensuring that it does not gain financially by cancelling services to avoid paying compensation for delayed services.

Mersey Crossing

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission a further evaluation of the proposed route for the new Mersey crossing having regard to strategic communications from Wales, Cheshire, the Liverpool airport and the Wirral area as a whole. [19324]

Mr. Watts: A study into such a crossing was completed in 1994 and copies of the study report were sent to MPs, MEPs and local authorities in the vicinity of the suggested crossing routes. It is not available generally. It was supplied to MPs and local authorities confidentially. The situation has not changed significantly since that time, when my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) said that a publicly-funded crossing could not be justified either on environmental or economic grounds. There is no justification for a further study by the Government.

Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the current runway capacity of each of the UK's major airports and in each case the projected date that this capacity will be reached; [18440]

(2) what is the current terminal capacity of each of the United Kingdom's major airports and in each case the projected date that this capacity will be reached. [18428]

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for individual airport operators.

Road Accidents

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road accidents involving heavy goods vehicles have resulted in (i) personal injury and (ii) fatalities; and how many people were *(a)* injured or *(b)* killed in these accidents, (1) nationally and (2) in Berkshire in each of the past five years. [19666]

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Road accidents involving HGVs, and resulting casualties: Great Britain and Berkshire: 1990–94

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
ACCIDENTS INVOLVING HGVs					
Great Britain					
Fatal accidents	791	683	650	608	540
Other injury accidents	14,272	12,933	12,366	12,565	12,638
Total	15,063	13,616	13,016	13,173	13,178
Berkshire					
Fatal accidents	8	10	5	3	7
Other injury accidents	125	132	146	157	165
Total	133	142	151	160	172
CASUALTIES IN ACCIDENTS INVOLVING HGVs					
Great Britain					
Killed	885	782	742	699	620
Injured	20,044	18,610	17,732	17,956	18,528
Total	20,929	19,392	18,474	18,655	19,148
Berkshire					
Killed	10	20	5	4	7
Injured	163	208	213	220	223

Road accidents involving HGVs, and resulting casualties: Great Britain and Berkshire: 1990–94

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Total	173	228	218	224	230

Figures for 1991 include 10 killed and 8 injured in a multiple vehicle accident on the M4 in Berkshire.

Road Maintenance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what capital provision was made available for the structural maintenance of local authority roads in 1996–97; and for what reasons structural maintenance provision has been reduced. [19772]

Mr. Norris: A total of £86.7 million has been allocated to English local authorities in 1996–97, for the structural maintenance of their principal roads. Transport has had to make its contribution to the overriding need for strict control of public expenditure. There are joint arrangements with local authorities to monitor the condition of local authority roads. There is no evidence at present of any significant deterioration in the condition of local authority principal roads.

Oil Pollution (Sea Empress Incident)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to address any shortfall in the compensation funds available to those who have suffered from the Sea Empress disaster. [19785]

Mr. Norris: Assessments undertaken to date indicate that it is unlikely that there will be any shortfall in compensation funds from the ship's insurer or the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report*, column *755*, if he will list the 67 member states involved in the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund. [19480]

Mr. Norris: The 67 member states are:

Albania
Algeria
Australia
Bahamas
Barbados
Belgium
Benin
Brunei Darussalam
Cameroon
Canada
Cote d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cyprus
Denmark
Djibouti
Estonia
Fiji
Finland
France
Gabon
Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Ireland
Italy
Japan
Kenya
Kuwait
Liberia
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Marshall Island
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico
Monaco
Morocco
Netherlands
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Papua New Guinea
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Republic of Korea
Russian Federation
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Slovenia
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sweden
Syrian Arab Republic
Tunisia
Tuvalu
United Arab Emirates
United Kingdom
Vanuatu
Venezuela
Yugoslavia

In addition, Tonga is expected to become a member of the fund from 1 May 1996.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what co-ordination arrangements he has established for claims for compensation arising from the Sea Empress disaster. [19438]

Mr. Norris: The Government have brokered an arrangement with the vessel's insurers and the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund to enable

them to establish a joint claims handling office in Milford Haven. Interim payments will be made to individuals and small businesses suffering financial hardship.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what amount will be available from the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund for claims arising from the Sea Empress disaster. [19437]

Mr. Norris: Under the 1969 international convention on civil liability for oil pollution damage and the 1971 international convention on the establishment of an international fund for compensation for oil pollution damage, implemented in the United Kingdom by the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, of the total of approximately £57 million available for claims for the Sea Empress, about £49 million will be available from the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund and about £8 million from the Sea Empress insurers.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *755*, who will meet costs associated with the Sea Empress disaster in the event that the special drawing rights are exhausted. [19481]

Mr. Norris: Assessments undertaken to date indicate that it is unlikely that there will be any shortfall in compensation funds from the ship's insurer or the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund. Under the international convention on the establishment of an international fund for compensation from oil pollution damage of 1971, should the amount of established claims exceed the amount available, the compensation shall be distributed in such a manner that the proportion between any established claim and the amount of compensation actually offered shall be the same for all claimants. There are also voluntary industry schemes, which may provide further compensation for the damage. The Government have agreed not to press their claim until other compensation is agreed.

Bus Companies (Privatisation)

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage the privatisation of local authority-owned bus companies. [20449]

Mr. Norris: The great majority of bus services in the United Kingdom are now provided by private sector bus companies. Since 1988, 28 local authority-owned bus companies, including the eight largest, have moved successfully into the private sector. We welcome this and are continuing to encourage the other bus company owners to consider seriously the options for privatisation.

At present there is a targeted relaxation in the set-aside rate for receipts by local authorities from sale of shares in their bus companies of 25 per cent.—and it had been intended that this would revert to the normal 50 per cent. rate with effect from 1 April. In order to assist local authorities planning to sell their bus companies in the next financial year, we have decided to extend the present set-aside rate of 25 per cent. for these sales to 31 March 1997.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19898]

Mr. Norris: The information requested about current competitions cannot be disclosed on the ground of commercial confidentiality.

Rail Freight (London)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many freight trains run along the Catford loop line towards London on Sundays between the hours of 11 pm and 9 am; and how many freight trains run along the Catford loop lines away from London on Sundays between the hours of 11 pm and 9 am; [19973]

(2) how many freight trains run along the Catford loop line towards London from Monday to Friday between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am; and how many freight trains run along the Catford loop line away from London from Monday to Friday between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am; [19971]

(3) how many freight trains run along the Catford loop line towards London on Saturdays between the hours of 11 pm and 8 am; and how many freight trains run along the Catford loop line away from London on Saturdays between the hours of 11 pm and 8 am. [19972]

Mr. Norris: The number of freight trains that are normally expected to run on the Catford loop line, in the direction and between the hours shown, are as follows:

Direction and time	*Number of trains*
Toward London between the hours of 11 pm (Sundays to Thursdays) and 7 am (Mondays to Fridays)	Up to 20
Away from London between the hours of 11 pm (Sundays to Thursdays) and 7 am (Mondays to Fridays)	Up to 21
Toward London between the hours of 11 pm Friday and 8 am Saturday	Up to 5

Direction and time	Number of trains
Away from London between the hours of 11 pm Friday and 8 am Saturday	Up to 15
Toward London between the hours of 11 pm Saturday and 9 am Sunday	Up to 4
Away from London between the hours of 11 pm Saturday and 9 am Sunday	Nil

There may be a need to run additional or replacement freight services due to diversions from other routes owing to night track maintenance or disruptions elsewhere. Similarly, fewer trains would run on the Catford loop line while track maintenance is carried out on that line.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make public the terms of the contracts he has signed with London and Continental Railways Ltd., the private sector promoter of the channel tunnel rail link; and if he will list the benefits of the channel tunnel rail link project to the nation. [20456]

Mr. Watts: Further to the undertaking given to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 29 February 1996, *Official Report*, column 1008, I have today placed in the Library of the House and in the Vote Office copies of a memorandum which summarises the most significant obligations of both London and Continental Railways and the Government under the terms of the contracts which were signed last week. Some of the aspects of the contracts are, and will remain, commercially confidential and have therefore been excluded. The memorandum provides further details of the benefits of the Channel tunnel rail link project to the nation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mr. Abdul Quaayum Raja

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of those convicted of similar offences to Mr. Abdul Quaayum Raja (c48348) who have *(a)* received reductions in their security categories, *(b)* been guaranteed home leave and *(c)* granted parole; and if he will make a statement. [19775]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for a list of names of those convicted of similar offences to Mr. Abdul Quaayum Raja who have (a) received reductions in their security categories, (b) been guaranteed home leave and (c) granted parole.

A prisoner's security category is reviewed on a strictly individual basis and decisions are taken in the light of all the particular circumstances of the individual case. Comparisons with the cases of other prisoners is not therefore appropriate or useful in determining the security category of an individual prisoner.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will disclose to solicitors representing Abdul Quaayum Raja (C 48348) *(a)* reports and documentation on which the Security Category Review Committee reached conclusions about Mr. Raja's dedication to a political cause, *(b)* the full summary of the committee's June 1995 decision concerning Mr. Raja and *(c)* any new documentation available for Mr. Raja's 1996 review; and if he will make a statement. [19477]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about disclosure to solicitors representing Abdul Quaayum Raja of (a) any reports or documentation on which the Security Category Review Committee reached conclusions about Mr. Raja's dedication to a political cause, (b) the full summary of the Committee's June 1995 decision concerning Mr. Raja and (c) any new documentation available for Mr. Raja's 1996 review.

It is not the policy of the Prison Service to provide prisoners or their representatives with copies of reports prepared for the purposes of security category reviews. In accordance with the judgement, in December 1993, in the case of Regina v the Secretary of State for the Home Department, ex parte Duggan, a prisoner is, subject to any necessary exceptions arising out of the public interest immunity, informed of the gist of any matter of fact and/or opinion relevant to the determination of his security category; and given reasons for any decision which results in him remaining as a category A prisoner.

Mr. Raja's security category was last reviewed by the Category A Committee on 21 June 1995. The Committee's recommendation, which was subsequently approved by the Prison Service Director of Security, was that Mr. Raja should remain as a category A prisoner. The reasons for this decision were notified to Mr. Raja on 25 September 1995.

Arrangements for the 1996 review of Mr. Raja's security category are underway and reports have recently been requested from Long Lartin prison. He will in due course be provided with a gist of all information relevant to the determination of his security category and given an opportunity to comment before any decision is taken.

Thames Valley and Hampshire Police

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make additional resources available to Thames Valley and Hampshire police forces for the year 1996. [19780]

Mr. Maclean: Spending on the police in 1996–97 will increase in Thames Valley by 5 per cent. and in Hampshire by 3.9 per cent. over the previous year. This represents additional resources of £9.7 million and £6.6 million respectively.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost of policing the construction of the Newbury bypass to date. [19974]

Mr. Maclean: Policing of the bypass site is a joint operation between Thames Valley police and Hampshire constabulary.

As at 8 March, additional policing costs have been estimated by Thames Valley police to be about £930,000 and by Hampshire constabulary at about £240,000.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration detainees there were in each establishment in which they were held in January 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996. [18895]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* The available information on persons detained solely under Immigration Act 1988 powers on 31 January 1996 is given in the table; the data exclude non-asylum port cases in detention for less than a month, as information on these cases is not available centrally. Corresponding information for 1993 to 1995 is not available.

Persons[1] recorded as detained on 31 January 1996 solely under Immigration Act powers

Place of detention	*[2]Number detained*
Prison Service establishment	
HMP Rochester	152
HMP Haslar	92
HMP Winson Green	49
HMP Brixton	19
HMP Greenock	12
HMP Wandsworth	12
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	12
HMP Crumlin Road	11
HMP Holloway	4
HMP Armley	3
HMP Belmarsh	3
HMP Bristol	3
HMP Craiginchess	3
HMP Liverpool	3
HMP Doncaster	2
HMP Elmley	2
HMP Pentonville	2
HMP Preston	2
HMP The Mount	2
HMP Winchester	2
HMYOI Feltham	3
Other establishments	23
	416
Immigration Service detention centres[3]	
Campsfield House	153
Harmondsworth	90
Gatwick	37
Queen's Building	19
Newhaven	16
Stansted	16
Dover	15
Manchester	9
Birmingham	4
Other posts	13
	372
Other places of detention	
Police cells	84
Unknown[4]	5
	89
Total	877

[1] Excluding non-asylum port cases in detention for less than a month.
[2] Data are subject to recording error (eg in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention).
[3] Including detention accommodation at ports.
[4] Venue is not recorded in the statistics.

Mohd Riaz

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for Mohd Riaz, detained in Durham, to be transferred to a prison nearer his parents; and if he will make a statement. [19478]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Mr. Riaz being transferred to a prison nearer his parents.

Mr. Riaz will be considered for a transfer later this year, in the light of prison reports which are due in August.

Prisons (Illegal Drugs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of Her Majesty's prisons is now free of illegal drugs use by inmates; and in which there is illegal drug use by 5 per cent. or more of their inmates. [18628]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about illegal drug use in prisons.

Mandatory drug testing had been introduced in 120 prisons by the third week of February and will be introduced in remaining prisons by 31 March.

It is too early to identify trends in drug misuse because many prisons have been testing for three months or less and others have yet to begin.

Football

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the premier league and football league clubs giving the total cost of policing and the number of officers involved for each season since 1990–91. [19308]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not held centrally.

Fire Service College

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has received from the Fire Service College concerning its future; and if he will make a statement. [19892]

Mr. Sackville: None. The Fire Service College is a part of the Home Office. It will continue to operate as a next steps agency.

Prisons (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual cost per prisoner in each prison in the Greater Manchester area. [18256]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the annual cost per prisoner in each prison in the Greater Manchester area.

In 1994–95 the annual net operating cost per prisoner for each of the prisons in Greater Manchester was:

Buckley Hall: £108,333

Hindley: £27,985

Manchester: £22,894.

Buckley Hall did not start to take prisoners until 14 December 1994. The figure above is not a true annual cost but reflects the start-up costs and low initial prisoner population figures.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of prison inmates in each of the prisons in the Greater Manchester area who have been put on report for being in possession of illegal drugs, in each of the last 12 months. [18258]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question concerning the number of prison inmates in each of the prisons in the Greater Manchester area who have been put on report for being in possession of illegal drugs.

Provisional figures for the period February 1995 to January 1996 for proved adjudications for possession of controlled drugs are given in the attached table.

Offences[1] for possession of a controlled drug in Prison Service establishments in the Greater Manchester area, February 1995–January 1996

	Establishments[2]	
	Manchester	Hindley
1995		
February	13	3
March	15	9
April	12	6
May	13	2
June	11	3
July	28	2
August	18	10
September	10	12
October	18	8
November	15	15
December	13	13
1996		
January	15	10

[1] Including incite or assist the possession of controlled drugs.

[2] Provisional information.

Open Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms exist to inform the community in the vicinity of an open prison of the presence of an inmate serving a life sentence for rape; and if he will make a statement. [18089]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about informing the community in the vicinity of an open prison of the presence of an individual prisoner serving a life sentence for rape.

There are no mechanisms in existence to inform the community in the vicinity of an open prison of the presence of an inmate serving a life sentence for rape.

However the Board of Visitors, whose members are drawn from the local community, do have free access to the prisoners and their records.

Prison Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of assaults on prison officers working in special hospital units of prisons in England and Wales during 1995. [18086]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of assaults in 1995 on prison officers working in special hospital units of prisons in England and Wales.

Provisional figures show that in 1995 the number of proven adjudications for assaults on staff of prison officer grade or another member of staff in prisons was 2,774. This figure includes any proven charges of attempting, inciting or assisting in an assault. Information is not available on the location of the assault within the establishment.

Hewell Grange, Worcestershire

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the handling by his Department of its earlier responsibility for Hewell Grange, Worcestershire and the present state of this matter. [17809]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Andrew Faulds, dated 8 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the handling of responsibility for Hewell Grange, Worcestershire and the present state of this matter.

The future of Hewell Grange prison will be considered in the context of the recently completed review of open prisons.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 11 March 1996

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Office Space

Mr. Soley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to buy or rent office space in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. [19363]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor's Department, including its executive agencies, has no plans to rent or buy office accommodation in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham in the immediate future.

Transsexuals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent from public funds in the last two financial years on cases brought by transsexuals in the European Court. [19259]

The Attorney-General: Legal costs amounting to £7,357 were incurred for the purposes of the Government's intervention in one case in the European Court of Justice.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been expended from public funds in each of the last five financial years in defence of actions brought by transsexuals against the Government or their Departments. [19258]

The Attorney-General: The information requested by the hon. Member is contained in my letter of 4 March to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), which has been placed in the Libraries of the House. In summary, the total cost so far of the three current cases alleging breaches of the European convention on human rights is £26,245. The cost of the recent unsuccessful application for judicial review against the registrar general was £14,597. The cost of proceedings for unfair dismissal brought by a person who was dismissed by the Prison Service was £28,260.

TREASURY

Factor 8

Mr. Barron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on charging value added tax on *(a)* recombinant factor 8 and *(b)* plasma-derived factor 8; how much of each is (i) exported and (ii) imported annually; and what revenue accrues to the Exchequer as a result. [19565]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Human blood and substances derived from it, including plasma-derived factor 8, are exempt from VAT under items 6 and 7 of group 7 of schedule 9 to the Value Added Tax Act 1994. Recombinant factor 8, being synthetic and not derived from human blood, does not fall within the exemption. Its taxable treatment is the same as that of other drugs and therapeutic products, both here and in other EC member states in accordance with the sixth VAT directive of 1977.

There are no official import or export data relating to these specific products.

The application of the standard rate of VAT to recombinant factor 8 is estimated to raise approximately £1.2 million per year.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Walden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue from the extension of value added tax to *(a)* newspapers, *(b)* children's shoes and *(c)* other exempt items. [19323]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The tax ready reckoner and tax reliefs, published by Her Majesty's Treasury in July 1995, shows that the estimated cost of not applying standard rate VAT to certain groups of expenditure is as follows:

	£ million 1995–96
(a) Books, newspapers and magazines	1,200
(b) Children's clothing and footwear	750
(c) Other zero and reduced rate items	15,700
Exempt items	5,750

These figures make no allowance for changes in consumer behaviour.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19415]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As the table shows, seven written parliamentary questions and 99 letters from Members have been referred to the executive agencies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer since the arrangements for delegating replies to agencies were introduced in October and December 1992 respectively:

Year	*Written Questions*	*Letters*
1992	3	—
1993	—	16
1994	—	45
1995	2	36
1996 to date	2	2
	7	99

These are tiny proportions of Members' 7,500 written questions and 60,200 letters to Treasury Ministers over this period.

ENVIRONMENT

Cumbria County Council

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that public money allocated by Cumbria county council for the funding of trade union duties has not been spent on those trade union activities for which public money is not permitted to be used. [18813]

Mr. Gummer: I am sure my right hon. Friend will want to draw his concerns to the attention of the independent auditor of the county council, who is empowered to act in cases of illegal expenditure.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has issued to local authorities about the form in which they record expenses arising from their responsibilities to asylum seekers following the implementation of new benefit regulations on 5 February. [19612]

Mr. Curry: An official in my Department wrote to all directors of housing in English local authorities on 12 February to advise them about information that they could collect. I am placing a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Local Government Officers (Pay)

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the statutory obligations on local authorities to publish the salaries and other employment costs of senior local government officers; and what assessment he has made of the availability of such information to the public. [19617]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have today laid before Parliament the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 which will require the annual statement of accounts of local authorities to disclose the number of employees whose remuneration falls in each bracket of a scale in multiples of £10,000 starting with £40,000. "Remuneration" means all amounts paid to or receivable by an employee, including the estimated money value of any benefits received or receivable otherwise than in cash. These new requirements will apply for the first time to the financial year 1996–97. Local authority statements of accounts will continue to be required to be published and to be available for public inspection.

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19458]

Sir Paul Beresford: Information which identifies externally purchased computer processing is available only for 1991–92 to 1995–96.

The only external processing in this period provided by other departments was the payroll processing service from the Treasury Chessington Computer Centre and the superannuation service from the Paymaster General's Office.

Contracts with private sector contractors in this period were:

Contractor	*Project*	*Expenditure per annum* £
F International	Construction industry consultants and contractors registers	110,000
CFM	Construction industry consultants and contractors registers	180,000
CAM Ltd.	National dwelling and household survey	3,000
Peter Peregrinus Ltd.	Environmental research in Britain database	70,000

Flags

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 1 March, *Official Report*, column *747*, what distinction is made between the flags of sovereign nations and states and those of non-sovereign nations, British dependencies, territories or colonies. [19606]

Sir Paul Beresford: The provision in schedule 2—class 1—to the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992 refer to "the national flag of any country", without further interpretation. It would be for the court to interpret how these provisions should apply to a particular flag. No judicial authority is known to my Department.

Fire Service

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has recently received from the Fire Brigades Union; and if he will make a statement. [19752]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Fire Brigades Union has made representations to the Department on overall fire service funding for 1996–97, on the fire service college and on the report of the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement in the UK. Overall fire service funding and the fire service college are matters for the Home Secretary. The Government's response to the report of the interdepartmental review will be given as soon as possible.

Leghold Traps

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the outcome of the discussions relating to animal leghold traps at the Environment Council on Monday 4 March. [20209]

Mr. Gummer: As a result of UK representations, supported by the Ministers of several other member states, the Commission was invited to produce a fixed timetable as soon as possible for the negotiations that it is conducting with the fur-producer countries. The Council also accepted unanimously the UK's proposals that the import ban on furs obtained by leghold traps should come into force on 1 January 1997, unless this final attempt at a negotiated agreement with the producer states on the introduction of alternative humane traps succeeds.

Released Animals (Disease)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on protocols to reduce the risk of disease from released animals being transferred to their own kind in the wild, or to species other than their own. [17908]

Mr. Clappison: No research has been commissioned into the risks of disease transference from released animals either to their own kind or to other species.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the Housing Bill were considered in environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department; [19544]

(2) if the Housing Bill has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by his Department; [19543]

(3) how the Housing Bill was modified by the results of environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department; [19545]

(4) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the Housing Bill. [19546]

Mr. Clappison: The Housing Bill, introduced into Parliament on 18 January, implements policies set out in the White Paper, "Our Future Homes", published in June 1995. Referring to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration to the hon. Lady on Wednesday 22 November 1995, *Official Report* column *114*, environmental considerations were taken into account in the preparation of this White Paper, and a specific chapter on "Housing and the Environment" set out the Government's aim of meeting demand for housing in an environmentally sustainable way.

The specific provisions in the Bill do not have significant environmental implications. The environmental and sustainable development implications of housing policy more generally will, however, continue to be kept under review, in accordance with the Department's guidance.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the environmental appraisal conducted under the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" published by his Department on the forthcoming proposals to revise the outdoor advertisement control regime. [19579]

Sir Paul Beresford: The consultation paper entitled "Outdoor Advertisement Control: Areas of Special Control of Advertisements" is intended to contribute to the policy appraisal process. The paper and the accompanying research consultants' report outline the environmental consequences of possible changes to the areas of special advertisement control regime. The responses to consultation will help to complete the appraisal process before my right hon. Friend's decision is taken.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the environmental appraisal conducted under the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" published by his Department on the forthcoming guidance to the Environment Agency. [19578]

Mr. Clappison: An environmental appraisal conducted according to "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" was not appropriate for the forthcoming guidance to the Environment Agency. The guidance was concerned not with identifying and judging policy options but rather with advising the agency on its objectives and the contribution it should make towards achieving sustainable development.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how the Housing Contracts, Construction and Development Bill was modified by the results of environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department; [19541]

(2) if the Housing Contracts, Construction and Development Bill has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by his Department; [19539]

(3) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the Housing Contracts, Construction and Development Bill; [19542]

(4) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the Housing Contracts, Construction and Development Bill were considered in environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department. [19540]

Mr. Clappison: The housing provisions within the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill implements policies set out in the White Paper, "Our Future Homes", published in June 1995. Referring to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration to the hon. Lady on Wednesday 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *114*, environmental considerations were taken into account in the preparation of this White Paper, and a specific chapter on "Housing and the Environment" set out the Government's aim of meeting demand for housing in an environmentally sustainable way.

Of the other provisions, the Bill will enable a wider range of energy saving measures to become eligible for grants made in connection with the home energy efficiency scheme. The proposed powers for financial assistance under the single regeneration budget will support activities that help to create an attractive and safe environment. The other provisions within the Bill have little or no environmental impact.

In implementing the policies and provisions within this Bill, environmental and sustainable development considerations will be assessed in accordance with the Department's guidance as it relates to each policy area. For example, successful schemes under the single regeneration budget challenge fund will be monitored to ensure that the intended outputs, including improvements to land and buildings, waste management, recycling schemes, etcetera, are achieved.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "Policy Guidelines for the Coast"; [19526]

(2) "Policy Guidelines for the Coast" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and Environment"; and if he will publish the appraisal; [19523]

(3) What alternative courses of action from those detailed in "Policy Guidelines for the Coast" were considered in the environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department; [19524]

(4) how "Policy Guidelines for the Coast" was modified by the results of environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department. [19525]

Mr. Clappison: An environmental appraisal conducted according to "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" was not appropriate for the recent DOE publication "Policy Guidelines for the Coast" as this set out—in summary form—existing policies on the various issues described.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the draft circular "Local Government Change and the planning system" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by his Department; [19531]

(2) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the draft circular "Local Government Change and the Planning System" were considered in environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department; [19532]

(3) how the draft circular "Local Government Change and the Planning System" was modified by the results of any environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [19533]

(4) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the draft circular "Local Government Change and the Planning System". [19534]

Sir Paul Beresford: An environmental appraisal conducted according to "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" was not appropriate for the consultation draft circular "Local Government Change and the Planning System". The draft circular is not concerned with identifying and judging new planning policies; its purpose is to explain how development plan functions and procedures will be affected by changes made following the Local Government Commission's review of local government structure, and how transitional regulations will enable work in progress on development plans to continue after those changes come into effect.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the consultation paper, "Planning Obligations"—draft revised DOE circular 16/91—has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by his Department; [19535]

(2) how the consultation paper "Planning Obligations"—draft revised DOE circular 16/91— was modified by the results of environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [19537]

(3) what alternative courses of action from those detailed in the consultation paper "Planning Obligations"—draft revised DOE circular 16/91—were considered in environmental appraisal undertaken by his Department; [19536]

(4) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of the consultation paper "Planning Obligations"—draft revised DOE circular 16/91. [19538]

Sir Paul Beresford: An environmental appraisal conducted according to "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" was not appropriate for the consultation draft circular "Planning Obligations"—proposed as a replacement for DOE circular 16/91. The draft revised circular is not concerned with identifying and judging new planning policies; its purpose is rather to reaffirm the advice contained in circular 16/91 in the light of recent legal decisions and to clarify existing guidance on detailed matters.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the results of the environmental appraisal conducted under the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" published by his Department on the forthcoming consultation paper on draft hedgerow regulations. [19577]

Mr. Clappison: The Government expressed their commitment to the protection of key hedgerows in the 1990 White Paper "This Common Inheritance". This commitment was renewed in 1994 when the results of a survey into hedgerow changes between 1990 and 1993 were published. The report showed that, although the rate of hedgerow removal has slowed and was now broadly balanced by that for new planting, hedgerows of key importance were still at risk. Consideration of the environmental impacts that would result if action was not taken to address this trend has therefore been a major factor throughout the development of our policy, and will inform the forthcoming consultation paper on hedgerow protection regulations. The regulations themselves will be introduced only after careful consideration of all responses received.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the savings to business from the Deregulation (Building) (Initial Notices and Final Certificates) Order 1996. [19500]

Mr. Clappison: The estimated saving to business that will result from this order is £68,000 per annum.

Waste Classification

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he expects the report on the consultation exercise on the system for classifying waste for the national waste classification system; and if he will publish the results; [19692]

(2) if he will make it his policy to extend the scope of the proposed category 1 of the system for classifying waste for the national waste classification system to include salt purification waste; [19696]

(3) if he will change the emphasis in the system for classifying wastes for the national waste classification system between the natural qualities of the material and their disposal method and the process through which they may pass. [19697]

Mr. Clappison: The national waste classification scheme is being introduced with several aims:

to provide a means to describe waste consistently that will assist waste producers and the waste management industry in assessing the wastes they have to deal with;

to help promote consistency of waste management licensing and the effectiveness of the duty of care; and

to assist the new environment agencies in their waste management planning roles to provide the sort of information on the production and management of waste that is needed for the development of sound waste strategies at both local and national level.

The stage 2 consultation paper on the national waste classification scheme classifies waste by both the intrinsic properties and its origins. I propose to keep to these principles in the third stage of consultation.

Responses to stage 2 of the consultation exercise, including those about the classification of salt purification waste, are being considered. The results will be published next month as part of the third stage of consultation. This will involve the introduction of the scheme on a non-statutory basis from April, so that its use can be fully assessed.

Water (Conservation and Consumer Choice) Bill

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing the Water (Conservation and Consumer Choice) Bill. [19779]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* The Department has received about 3,000 representations to date. Almost all have been inspired by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' campaign, which urges members to write in support of the Bill. The majority of the representations dealt with reflect that view.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in the headquarters division of his Department in each year from 1991 to the current year. [19801]

Sir Paul Beresford: The following information gives the numbers of professional scientists and engineers each year from 1991 to the current year.

Grade	*1991*		*1992*		*1993*		*1994*		*1995*		*1996*	
	Scientists	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*	*Scientists*	*Engineers*
Grade 3	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grade 4	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Grade 5	4	8	5	9	7	6	10	7	8	6	7	6
Grade 6	19	31	20	27	22	24	23	23	23	22	22	23
Grade 7	68	90	70	88	75	94	83	85	80	80	78	72
SEO and equivalent	42	58	85	63	107	70	110	69	114	69	110	62
HEO and equivalent	14	12	14	14	19	13	20	10	12	8	11	2
EO and equivalent	0	5	0	12	0	19	0	2	0	1	0	1
AO and equivalent	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
AA and equivalent	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to amend the public interest immunity certificates issued in the litigation brought by Andrew Balfour. [18811]

Mr. Hanley: The public interest immunity certificates issued have been upheld by the Court of Appeal, and there are no plans to amend them.

Iran

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support the introduction of international trade sanctions against Iran. [19762]

Mr. Hanley: We have a number of serious concerns about Iranian policy which we and our European Union partners make clear to the Iranian Government. Exports to Iran are strictly controlled. But we do not believe that an international trade embargo would be practicable.

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *766*, if he will ensure that no licences will be granted for export of equipment to the former Yugoslavia that could be used in the development of indigenous arms industries. [19956]

Mr. David Davis: We will consider all export licence applications for defence equipment to the former Yugoslavia on a case by case basis as explained in the answer to which the hon. Member refers.

For the duration of the implementation force's deployment, our primary objective will be the safety of British troops.

Kenya

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions Her Majesty's Government are taking to promote increased investment from the United Kingdom to Kenya; and if he will make a statement. [17102]

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department, together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Overseas Development Administration, is offering assistance to the Kenyan Government in their efforts to attract investment through financial and technical assistance and the introduction of key Kenyan individuals to UK organisations for attracting inward investment. We are also making potential UK investors aware of the opportunities in Kenya through our trade promotion programme.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in Sierra Leone with particular reference to allegations of breaches of human rights. [19342]

Mr. Hanley: Any lasting improvement in the political and human rights situations in Sierra Leone depends on the restoration of accountable, civilian government and an end to the rebel war. We therefore welcome the elections held on 26 and 27 February as well as the opening of peace talks between Sierra Leone authorities and the Revolutionary United Front.

Mr. Omar al Hassan

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about Mr. Omar al Hassan; and if he will make a statement. [17855]

Mr. Hanley: From time to time, this Department receives information about Dr. al Hassan and the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Coal Enterprise

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) upon what criteria the successful bids for British Coal Enterprise will be chosen; and if he will make a statement; [19894]

(2) how many bids have been made for British Coal Enterprise; and by whom. [19893]

Mr. Page: The sale of British Coal Enterprise is a matter for British Coal. I understand, however, that the corporation has announced that two management buy-out teams have been identified as preferred bidders for the business funding and outplacement arms of BCE. Discussions will be continuing with a number of parties about the sale of the company's property portfolio.

When launching the sales process for BCE, British Coal indicated that it would be considering proposals for the company in the light of its statutory duties and the importance of ensuring continuation of effective assistance to coalfield communities.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many bids *(a)* he has received, *(b)* he has rejected and *(c)* are still under consideration for British Coal Enterprise; and if he will make a statement; [19127]

(2) what criteria the bidding party has to fulfil to be accepted as the buyer of British Coal Enterprise; and if he will make a statement; [19128]

(3) if he will make it his policy that the present level of economic regeneration in coal mining communities be maintained after the sale of British Coal Enterprise; [19129]

(4) if the sale of British Coal Enterprise will go ahead if the European Commission requires repayment of some or all of European regional development fund loans; [19130]

(5) if he will make it his policy that the money generated from the sale of British Coal Enterprise be used on new projects to regenerate coalfield areas; and if he will make a statement; [19131]

(6) if he will make it a condition of sale of British Coal Enterprise that the buyer will retain its activities in the United Kingdom coalfields; and if he will make a statement; [19132]

(7) what extra funding the coalfield areas fund will receive after the sale of British Coal Enterprise; [19133]

(8) when he will announce which bid has won the contract to buy British Coal Enterprise. [19134]

Mr. Page: The sale of British Coal Enterprise is a matter for British Coal. When launching the sales process, British Coal indicated that it would be considering proposals for the BCE in the light of its statutory duties and the importance of ensuring continuation of effective assistance to coalfield communities.

The Government's continuing support for economic regeneration in the coalfields is provided through regional selective assistance and the single regeneration budget, in addition to the availability of European structural funds.

Where projects supported by ERDF grant or the associated grant payments are complete, the Government do not believe that the sale of BCE or of its workspace activities, will affect the status of the projects or of the grants, provided that the assets continue to be used for eligible purposes and in accordance with the terms of the relevant offers of grant.

Where projects supported by ERDF grant or the associated grant payments are not complete, or where offers of grant are still to be made in response to applications from BCE, the Government will seek assurances from any prospective purchaser of BCE, or of its work space activities, that it will complete the projects in accordance with the terms of the offer of ERDF grant, continue to use the assets for eligible purposes and comply with the other requirements, both of the Government and of European Community law, as they relate to the offer of those grants.

The corporation has announced that two management buy-out teams have been identified as preferred bidders for for the business funding and outplacement arms of BCE. Discussions will be proceeding with a number of parties about the sale of the company's property portfolio. The corporation expects that the process will be concluded at or shortly after the end of March 1996.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to paragraphs D1.27 and D1.28 of the Scott report, if he will list those matters relating to the work of his Department since 1979 classified as matters about which successive administrations have refused to answer. [17418]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 February 1996]:* The Principal Clerk to the Table Office gave evidence in 1972 to a Select Committee appointed

"to consider the practice and procedure in relation to Questions and Question Time",

giving a list of matters about which successive Administrations have refused to answer. This list is referred to in the current edition of "Erskine May." Subjects listed under the Department of Trade and Industry are as follows:

- Commercial activities of the Overseas Marketing Corporation
- Trade Statistics for Scotland
- Financial support for trade fairs in the UK
- Relations between ECGD and individual exporters
- Reasons for refusal to refer mergers to monopolies Commission
- Names of complainants about companies
- Day to day matters for the English Tourist Board
- Details of defence research establishments
- Details of research contracts
- Forecasts of price movements
- Advice from Economic Planning Councils
- Details of financial assistance to individual companies
- Individual applicants for IDCs
- Details of export licenses
- Details of air miss inquiries
- Individual transactions between National Film Finance Corporation and Customers.

Some of these subjects no longer fall within the responsibilities of my Department.

On 9 November 1979, the then Secretary of State for Trade and the Under-Secretary of State for Industry stated that it was not possible to provide an exhaustive list of subjects on which they would decline to answer and that each question would be considered on its merits, *Official Report*, columns *365* and *338*. This is still the case.

Warren Springs Laboratory

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the research projects relating to the aviation industry undertaken by the Warren Springs laboratory in the five years prior to its closure. [19086]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19040]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Details of equipment stolen or otherwise unaccounted for from the Department during the last five years are set out.

All incidents involving losses exceeding £5,000 are listed individually, to the nearest £1,000.

	Value (£)
1991–92	
It equipment incidents: 24	30,000
Other equipment incidents: 46	66,000
Items over £5,000: Theft of chairs	49,000
1992–93	
It equipment incidents: 11	15,000
Other equipment incidents: 5	1,000
Items over £5,000: Theft of personal computers	7,000
1993–94	
IT equipment incidents: 20	59,000
Other equipment incidents: 35	9,000
Items over £5,000: Theft of computer chips	42,000
1994–95	
It equipment incidents: 35	69,000
Other equipment incidents: 26	17,000
Items over £5,000: Theft of vehicle	5,000
Theft of computer components	26,000

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Nursery Education

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library for each of the local education authority areas participating in her scheme for early years education, the names of the providers who have agreed to supply

existing, or new places, for the scheme together with the number of full-time equivalent places offered and the nature of their settings. [17869]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 28 February 1996]:* A list of providers classified by type has been placed in the Library of the House. The estimated number of four-year-olds in the maintained sector in each of the phase 1 authorities is listed below.

LEA	*Estimates number of four year-olds in maintained provision at January 1995*
Kensington and Chelsea	800
Wandsworth	2,600
Westminster	1,100
Norfolk	6,300

Travel to Interview Scheme

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what factors underlay her decision to extend the qualifying period of unemployment to be eligible for assistance under the travel to interview scheme from four to 13 weeks. [19101]

Mr. Forth: From April 1996, the travel to interview scheme will form part of a package of measures for people who have been unemployed for 13 weeks. It will support jobseeker's who are required to widen their search for jobs after they have been unemployed for 13 weeks and who, after the introduction of jobseeker's allowance, will be interviewed and expected to review their jobseeker's agreement at that point.

Youth Training (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many eligible young people in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* the Mexborough area of South Yorkshire are currently unable to obtain a place on a youth training scheme; and what this figure was 12 months ago. [19350]

Mr. Paice: The information is not available in the format requested.

In the Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council area, no young person within the youth training guarantee group was awaiting a place on youth training at January 1996. At the same time last year only one young person in the guarantee group had been waiting more than eight weeks for a training place.

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19466]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Access to Work

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) of 14 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *738*, what research her Department has undertaken into how many people will not be able to participate in the access to work scheme as a result of the priority setting; and if she will review the possibility of making available extra funding for the scheme. [19321]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Frank Field, dated 11 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about research into the number of people participating in the Access to Work programme; and about funding for the programme.

We have not undertaken research into how many people will not be able to participate in the programme as a result of the priority setting announced by the secretary of state on 14 December; although we know that about 80% of new applicants were employed.

The report of major research on Access to Work overall after its first year of operation will be published imminently.

By the end of January 1996 12,749 people (of whom 8,799 were new applicants) had been helped by Access to Work compared to 10,394 in the whole of 1994/5. Significant extra funds have been provided to make this possible.

I hope this is helpful.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in her Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19427]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is a matter of public record, but it could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional assisted places are to be made available, by school, in the north of England. [19622]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested for schools already participating in the assisted places scheme is given in the table:

	Number of additional entry places in September 1996
North-east	
Barnard Castle school	10
Central Newcastle high school	5
Dame Allan's boys' school	7
Dame Allan's girls' school	7
King's school, Tynemouth	28
Newcastle upon Tyne church high	30
Polam Hall school	10

	Number of additional entry places in September 1996
Royal Grammar school	5
Teeside high	7
Yarm school	10
North-west	
Arnold school	25
Austin Friars school	8
Belverdere school	20
Birkenhead high school	5
Birkenhead school	5
Bolton school boys' division	10
Bolton school girls' division	10
Bury Grammar school (boys)	10
Bury Grammar school (girls)	10
Casterton school	8
Cheadle Hulme School	5
Hulme Grammar school for boys	5
Hulme Grammar school for girls	5
King Edward VII school	5
King's school Chester	4
King's school Macclesfield	35
Kirkham Grammar	5
Manchester Grammar school	10
Manchester High school for girls	10
Merchant Taylors' boys' school	20
Merchant Taylors' school for girls	15
Queen Elizabeth's Grammar school	20
Queen Mary school	10
Sedbergh school	15
St. Ambrose college	22
St. Bede's college	25
St. Bees	4
St. Edward's	25
Stockport Grammar school	5
Stonyhurst college	29
Westholme school	40
William Hulme's Grammar	30
Withington Girls' school	3
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Ashville college	13
Batley Grammar school	30
Bootham	12
Bradford Girls' Grammar school	3
Bradford Grammar school	20
Giggleswick school	10
Harrogate Ladies' college	14
Hymers college	5
Leeds Girls' high school	5
Leeds Grammar school	15
Mount school	13
Queen Elizabeth Grammar school	10
Scarborough college	33
Sheffield High school for girls	12
St. Peter's school	5
Wakefield girls' high school	10
Woodhouse Grove	5

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce shortly the allocation of a further 1,100 entry places in September 1996 at 60 or so schools in England not currently participating in the scheme.

Higher Education Funding (London)

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the recurrent and formula capital grant for each higher education institution in London for 1995–96 and 1996–97, *(b)* the percentage variation in the level of grants between these years and *(c)* the total figures for institutions in Greater London. [19658]

Mr. Forth: This information was published on 29 February and communicated to institutions by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in its circular 4/96, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Jobcentres (Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many complaints were received about the services provided by jobcentres in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale for the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; [19628]

(2) what assessments she has made of the performance of jobcentres in *(a)* Burnley, *(b)* Pendle and *(c)* Rossendale measured against charter standards in the last 12 months. [19660]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 11 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your two recent written questions. The first concerned the number of complaints received about the services offered by Jobcentres in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale areas. The second question asked what assessment had been made of the performance of these Jobcentres against Charter standards.

As both questions relate to information obtained through monitoring performance against the Jobseeker's Charter, I am dealing with both questions in this reply.

The Jobseeker's Charter sets out obligations both of the Employment Service (ES) to deliver services, and of its clients. It informs jobseekers about the standards of service they can expect when visiting or calling ES offices, the help we provide, and what we expect from our clients. It is a valuable medium to demonstrate to jobseekers and others that ES is committed to looking at the services we provide, and that we actively seek to improve our standards, where possible. As part of this process, complaints about our services and suggestions for improving them are encouraged and welcomed.

Jobseeker's Charter statistical and monitoring returns are completed on a quarterly basis and, during the 12 months ended December 1995, within the Burnley ES District (which covers the areas of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale), 61 complaints were recorded.

This should be viewed in the context of staff in the district making 120,000 job submissions and conducting over 29,000 advisory interviews during that period. You should also be aware that 45 letters were received, complimenting the ES on the service it provides locally.

As well as recording suggestions and complaints, the ES currently monitors performance against five standards of service set out in its Jobseeker's Charter. These are:

Telephone answering times (within 30 seconds)

Waiting times (Clients to be seen within 10 minutes)

Answering correspondence (replies to written correspondence within 5 working days)

Currency of vacancies (during a sample week)

Speed and accuracy of payments

The performance levels achieved by Jobcentres in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale in the last four quarters is detailed below. Unfortunately, some of these standards are monitored at District, rather than Jobcentre, level , so the performance information contained in the table relates to all nine offices in the Burnley ES District, rather than just those in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale.

Burnley ES District

Percentage

Standard	Quarter ending March 1995	June 1995	September 1995	December 1995
Telephone answering time	100	96.5	85	92.8
Waiting time	90	99	97.1	99.4
Answering correspondence	100	100	100	100
Currency of vacancies	96	95.9	96	94
Speed and accuracy of payment	96.3	97.4	95.8	100

Performance against standards is regularly reviewed by ES managers and improvements are continually sought where possible. I hope this is helpful.

Age of Transfer, Burnham

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to determine the proposals from Buckinghamshire county council for a change in age of transfer in the Burnham area. [19442]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will determine these proposals as quickly as is compatible with a full and careful consideration of all comments made and the educational issues involved.

Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what criteria have been used by the Teacher Training Agency to appoint the members of the working groups which will develop draft standards for teachers; and if she will list the membership of each group and their professional qualifications. [19441]

Mr. Robin Squire: I will ask the chairman of the Teacher Training Agency, Mr. Geoffrey Parker, to write to the hon. Member as soon as the membership of the groups is finalised.

Student Grants

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students in higher education in Wales have received *(a)* mandatory and *(b)* discretionary grants in each of the last five years; what percentage of students this represents in each case; and what is the annual average amount of the grant in each case in each of the last five years. [19921]

Mr. Forth: The information requested for the academic years 1989–90 to 1993–94, the latest year for which data are available, is given in the following table. Since 1990–91, eligible students have also had access to non means-tested student loans. It is not possible to say what percentage of students received awards because some awards are made to students in private institutions for which population data are not available. The number of full-time and sandwich students in the final column is therefore given for illustration only.

Higher education awards: Students domiciled in Wales

Academic year	Mandatory [1]Awards (000)	Mandatory [2]Average grant (£)	Discretionary [1]Awards (000)	Discretionary [2]Average grant (£)	Total [1]Awards (000)	Full-time and sandwich HE students (000)
1989–90	28.4	1,540	1.2	1,630	29.6	31.0
1990–91	30.9	1,590	1.7	1,670	32.6	34.4
1991–92	34.8	1,620	1.4	1,830	36.2	38.7
1992–93	39.6	1,690	1.1	1,760	40.7	43.2
1993–94	42.3	1,740	0.3	1,840	42.6	47.7

Notes:
[1]Awards made by local education authorities to students normally domiciled in Wales irrespective of their place of study; includes placement year sandwich students.
[2] Average net maintenance grant paid by LEAs (to the nearest £10); excludes fees and placement year sandwich students
Source:
F503G, FESR, USR and HESA.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in the headquarters division of her Department in each year from 1991 to the current year. [19800]

Mr. Robin Squire: There are no practising professional scientists working in the Department for Education and Employment. The number of professional engineers is shown in the table:

Number of staff by grade

Date	Grade 7 engineer	Grade 6 engineer	Senior professional and technology officer
1 January 1991	1	0	2
1 January 1992	1	0	1
1 January 1993	1	0	1
1 January 1994	1	0	1
1 January 1995	0	1	1
1 January 1996	0	1	1

There are other professionally qualified engineers and scientists working in mainstream grades, but information on these staff is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Student Loans

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students in higher education in Wales have received loans from the Student Loans Company in each year that it has been granting them; and what has been the percentage of students claiming in each year and the annual average amount of the loan. [19922]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is given in the table. Figures are shown from the academic year 1990–91, when the student loan scheme was introduced, to 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available.

Student loans made to students studying in Wales

Academic year	*Number of loans taken out*	*Loans as a percentage of eligible students (Percentage)*	*Average loan £*
1990–91	7,100	22	384
1991–92	10,900	29	524
1992–93	15,900	36	643
1993–94	20,500	42	721
1994–95	26,500	51	1,018

Sources:
Student Loans Company, Welsh Office, Higher Educational Statistical Agency.

PRIME MINISTER

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to take up the recent suggestion by the United States Government regarding the declassification of hitherto secret data on plutonium to encourage other nations with military plutonium stocks to declassify and release similar data. [20267]

The Prime Minister: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to reveal details of the United Kingdom's stocks of fissile materials held for defence purposes.

Hong Kong (Visit)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Hong Kong. [19665]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) on 7 March, *Official Report*, columns *315–16.*

Royal Residences

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those members of the royal family living in accommodation a contribution to the upkeep of which is made from public funds. [19649]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of National Heritage to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *547.*

Weapons Licensing

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to make the Ministry of Defence the licensing authority in respect of weapons and goods licensable under the military list. [17207]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 26 February, *Official Report*, columns 589-604. The Department of Trade and Industry is to undertake a review of the current export control powers and procedures, following which a consultation paper will be produced.

Special Advisers

Mr. Hall: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a list of Ministers who have requested prior assent from the Prime Minister, under "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", paragraph 75, for payment from public funds to meet the expenses of special advisers whose salary is not met from public funds accompanying Ministers on overseas visits; and if he will indicate which requests were granted and which were refused for each year since 1990. [17495]

The Prime Minister: None.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister what percentage of European Community legislation has been simplified or repealed in the past year, as referred to in his oral answer of 12 April 1994, *Official Report*, column 18. [19618]

The Prime Minister: The answer that I gave on 12 April 1994 refers to the Commission estimate of the reduction in the volume of EC legislation arising from recommendations in the report on subsidiarity which was presented to the European Council meeting in Brussels in December 1993. In its "Better Law Making" report to the Madrid European Council in December 1995, the Commission reported on progress in implementing the Brussels programme. A copy of the report is in the Library of the House. Although the number of new Commission legislative proposals continues to decline, down from 48 in 1993 to a forecast of 19 in the 1996 work programme, the Government want the Commission to do more. I therefore welcome the remit given to the Commission by the Madrid European Council to bring forward further proposals to repeal and simplify both existing and proposed legislation.

Ex-service Men and Women

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of interdepartmental co-operation in relation to ex-service affairs; and if he will meet the chairman of the Royal British Legion to discuss his views on this matter. [19670]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. My noble Friend Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish has regular meetings with ex-services organisations, including the Royal British Legion. In addition, my noble Friends Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish and Lord Henley met

the Royal British Legion on 23 November 1994 to discuss the provision of Government services to ex-service men and women.

The Government's continuing commitment is to ensure that all Departments provide an effective service for every citizen.

Biodiversity Steering Group

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister which Departments are involved in the cross-sectional steering group on the United Kingdom biodiversity action plan; and what assistance they are giving the Department of the Environment. [17909]

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom biodiversity steering group included officials from the Department of the Environment, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office, the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Forestry Commission.

The steering group published its report containing advice on the Government on 13 December 1995. Departments throughout Whitehall, including those involved in the steering group, are assisting the Department of the Environment in preparing the Government's response to the report. We expect to publish this in the spring of 1996.

Welsh Office (Permanent Secretary)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to announce the appointment of the new permanent secretary of the Welsh Office. [19668]

The Prime Minister: The next permanent secretary of the Welsh Office will be selected following an open competition and the appointment will then be announced in the normal way.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, columns *101-2*, if he will set out in the same format information relating to *(a)* overstayers and *(b)* convicted criminals awaiting deportation; and if he will ensure that the figures relating to the three categories concerned are contained in future statistical publications. [19616]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in tables A and B covering all overstayers and convicted criminals respectively, including those who have applied for asylum. Information on asylum seekers in detention—which account for the great majority of immigration detainees—is already published in the annual Home Office statistical bulletin on asylum statistics, copies of which are in the Library. There are no plans to publish, in the half-yearly bulletin or annual Command Paper on immigration statistics, detailed analyses of the additional categories of immigration detainee.

Table A1: Overstayers recorded as detained[1] on 31 January 1996 by gender

	Number detained[2]
Male	60
Female	2
Total	62

[1]Under Immigration Act powers.
[2]Data are subject to recording error—eg in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention.

Table A2: Overstayers recorded as detained[1] on 31 January 1996, by length of detention

Length of detention	Number detained[2]
0–1 month	20
1–2 months	6
2–6 months	23
6–12 months	12
12 months+	1
Total	62

[1]Under Immigration Act powers.
[2]Data are subject to recording error—eg in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention.

Table A3: Overstayers recorded as detained[1] on 31 January 1996, by nationality

Nationality	Number detained[2]
Nigeria	14
Algeria	7
Ghana	7
Bangladesh	5
India	4
Jamaica	4
Pakistan	3
Poland	3
Morocco	2
Others	13
Total	62

[1]Under Immigration Act powers.
[2]Data are subject to recording error—eg in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention.

Table A4: Overstayers recorded as detained[1] on 31 January 1996, by place of detention

Place of detention	Number detained[2]
Prison Service establishments	
HMP Rochester	14
HMP Winson Green	6
HMP Haslar	4
HMP Wandsworth	2
Others	6
	32
Other places of detention	
Police cells	13
Campsfield House	10
Harmondsworth	6
Queen's Building	1
	30
Total	62

[1]Under Immigration Act powers.
[2]Data are subject to recording error—eg in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention.

Table B1: Convicted criminals[1] recorded as detained[2] on 31 January 1996, by gender

	Number detained[3]
Male	44
Female	5
Total	49

[1]Subject to deportation action either following a court recommendation or on grounds that their continued presence in the United Kingdom is not conducive to the public good (where the court did not address the question of making a recommendation for deportation).
[2]Under Immigration Act powers.
[3]Data are subject to recording error—eg in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention.

Table B2: Convicted criminals[1] recorded as detained[2] on 31 January 1996, by length of detention

Length of detention	Number detained[3]
0–1 month	10
1–2 months	18
2–6 months	15
6–12 months	6
12 months+	—
Total	49

[1]Subject to deportation action either following a court recommendation or on grounds that their continued presence in the United Kingdom is not conducive to the public good (where the court did not address the question of making a recommendation for deportation).
[2]Under Immigration Act powers.
[3]Data are subject to recording error—eg in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention.

Table B3: Convicted criminals[1] recorded as detained[2] on 31 January 1996, by nationality

Nationality	Number detained[3]
Nigeria	9
Gambia	8
Angola	3

Table B3: Convicted criminals[1] recorded as detained[2] on 31 January 1996, by nationality

Nationality	*Number detained*[3]
Colombia	3
Jamaica	3
Zaire	3
Algeria	2
Poland	2
Others	16
Total	49

[1]Subject to deportation action either following a court recommendation or on grounds that their continued presence in the United Kingdom is not conducive to the public good (where the court did not address the question of making a recommendation for deportation).
[2]Under Immigration Act powers.
[3]Data are subject to recording error—e.g. in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention.

Table B4: Convicted criminals[1] recorded as detained[2] on 31 January 1996, by place of detention

Place of detention	*Number detained*[3]
Prison Service establishments	
HMP Brixton	10
HMP Rochester	9
HMP Wandsworth	5
HMYOI Feltham	3
HMP Holloway	3
HMP Pentonville	2
HMP Preston	2
HMP The Mount	2
Others	8
	44
Other places of detention	
Campsfield House	3
Others	2
	5
Total	49

[1]Subject to deportation action either following a court recommendation or on grounds that their continued presence in the United Kingdom is not conducive to the public good (where the court did not address the question of making a recommendation for deportation).
[2]Under Immigration Act powers.
[3]Data are subject to recording error—e.g. in respect of delayed notification of reception into, and release from, detention.

Private Security Industry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he is undertaking, and with whom, on the statutory regulation of the private security industry; and if he will make a statement. [19353]

Mr. Maclean: We have spoken to the police, the industry, other Government Departments, and have examined evidence given to the Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into the private security industry. We are now consulting Cabinet colleagues on the way forward.

Convicted Prisoners (Deportation)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure that forms required under the Immigration Act 1971 to be filled in by convicted prisoners liable to deportation on conclusion of their sentences are not given to prisoners to whom they do not apply. [19506]

Mr. Kirkhope: I am not aware of any form required to be completed under the Immigration Act 1971 by people in this category. A person charged with an offence punishable with imprisonment may be served by the arresting authority with a notice warning him of his liability to deportation. The notice—IM3—sets out categories of persons who are not liable to deportation and every effort is made to ensure that notices are not given to people who are not so liable.

Anabolic Steroids

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 November, *Official Report*, columns *292–93*, when the Government will lay the draft modification order to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to outlaw the use of anabolic steroids and other similar drugs. [19311]

Mr. Sackville: We hope to lay the draft modification order very soon.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the number of family break-ups caused by the abuse of anabolic steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs in each year from 1979; [19320]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of violent crimes caused by the abuse of anabolic steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs in each year since 1979. [19319]

Mr. Sackville: No data are available to enable any such estimates to be made.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19422]

Mr. Howard: The information in the form requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Football

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the premier league and Endsleigh league clubs giving separately the total season's attendance at *(a)* matches played in the premier league and football league and *(b)* matches played in the FA cup and Coca-Cola cup along with (i) the total number of arrests and (ii) arrests as a percentage of total attendance at each category of such matches accurate to four decimal places for the seasons (1) 1990–91, (2) 1991–92, (3) 1992–93, (4) 1993–94 and (5) 1994–95. [19309]

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Member has previously received such information for seasons 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94. I refer the hon. Member to the

reply given to him on 15 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *691–93*, for details about the 1993–94 season. Details for the other seasons referred to were provided under cover of ministerial correspondence of 31 July 1991 and 1 February 1994—copies were also placed in the Library.

Information in the requested format for season 1994–95 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Arrests during season 1994–95 for premier league, Endsleigh league, FA cup and Coca-Cola cup matches is provided.

Premier League: 1,723
Endsleigh League: 2,127
FA Cup: 914
Coca-Cola Cup: 308

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has brought computer capacity from *(a)* other departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19465]

Mr. Howard: There are no records of computer capacity in my Department having been bought from other Departments or from the private sector since 1987.

Fire Fighters (Pensions)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the next meeting will be held of the review group, to review the pension arrangements for fire fighters; and when it will conclude its studies and publish its findings. [19764]

Mr. Sackville: No such meeting has been arranged. I hope that it will soon be possible to circulate a consultation document on the review group's findings to the fire service organisations.

Fire Brigades Union

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has recently received from the Fire Brigades Union; and if he will make a statement. [19753]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations from the Fire Brigades Union. Issues raised in recent months have included fire service funding, fire safety, the Fire Service College and the new brigade structure in Wales. All these representations have received, or will be given, considered replies.

Fire Brigades (Standards)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fire brigades failed to meet the statutory minimum standards for their rescue and firefighting role in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Northern Ireland in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [19758]

Mr. Sackville: I am satisfied that, in general, all brigades in England and Wales remain able to meet the nationally recommended standards of fire cover which are set out in terms of the response times that fire brigades are expected to maintain. Her Majesty's inspectors of fire services draw attention to any exceptions in the course of their inspections of brigades. It is for the fire authority concerned to take the appropriate action in any such case. Responsibilities for brigades in Scotland and Northern Ireland are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, respectively.

Peter Welch

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Peter Welch was awarded compensation by the European Court of Human Rights. [20529]

Mr. Maclean: Peter Welch claimed compensation of £320,596, but this claim was rejected by the court. In its judgment dated 26 February, the court ruled that Peter Welch's alleged losses could not legitimately be said to result from the application to him of the confiscatory provisions of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986. Therefore, no compensation was awarded, nor did the court grant him any costs in bringing the claim.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in the headquarters division of his Department in each year from 1991 to the current year. [19802]

Mr. Howard: The figures for the main Home Office, excluding Agencies, for 1993–96 are as follows. Figures are not available in the form requested for 1991 and 1992.

Grade and discipline	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Grade 3: (science and physics)	1	0	0	1
Grade 5: (research: social science)	1	1	1	1
Grade 5: (science: life science: toxicology)	1	0	0	1
Grade 5: (statistics)	3	3	3	3
Grade 6 (engineering telecommunications)	3	3	1	1
Grade 6 (research: social science)	1	4	5	5
Grade 6 (science)	0	0	0	2
Grade 6 (science: chemistry)	0	0	0	2
Grade 6 (science: forensics)	0	0	0	1
Grade 6 (science: life science)	1	1	1	1
Grade 6 (science: life science: biology)	2	0	0	2
Grade 6 (science: life science: zoology)	1	0	1	0
Grade 6 (science: physics)	1	1	1	1
Grade 7 (engineering mechanical)	1	1	1	1
Grade 7 (engineering metallurgy)	0	0	1	1
Grade 7 (engineering: tele-communications)	11	12	6	6
Grade 7 (research: social science)	14	15	14	13
Grade 7 (science: chemistry)[1]	18	2	2	2
Grade 7 (science: computer science)	3	3	4	5
Grade 7 (science: engineering)	3	3	3	2

Grade and discipline	1993	1994	1995	1996
Grade 7 (science: life science)	8	2	2	1
Grade 7 (science: life science: photography)	1	1	1	1
Grade 7 (science: operational research)	8	8	8	8
Grade 7 (science: physics)	11	12	12	11
Grade 7 (statistics)	21	20	19	19
Senior Executive Officer (engineering: civil)	1	1	1	1
Senior Executive Officer (engineering: electronic)	1	1	1	1
Senior Executive Officer (engineering: mechanical)	1	1	1	1
Senior Executive Officer (engineering: tele-communications)+	42	41	21	21
Senior Executive Officer (engineering: professional and technological construction)	0	1	0	1
Senior Executive Officer (science)	4	4	3	5
Senior Executive Officer (science: computer science)	7	9	8	8
Senior Executive Officer (science: electronics)	3	3	3	3
Senior Executive Officer (science: engineering)	2	2	2	2
Senior Executive Officer (science: mathematics/statistics)	1	1	1	1
Senior Executive Officer (science: meteorology)	1	1	1	1
Senior Executive Officer (science: operational research)	8	8	8	8
Senior Executive Officer (science: physics)	6	8	8	9
Senior Executive Officer (science: life sciences)	1	1	1	1
Senior Executive Officer (research: social science)	8	7	13	13
Higher Executive Officer (engineering)	1	1	1	1
Higher Executive Officer (engineering: building)	1	1	2	2
Higher Executive Officer (engineering: electronic)	5	4	3	3
Higher Executive Officer (engineering: mechanical)	1	1	1	2
Higher Executive Officer (engineering: mechanical/electrical)	1	1	1	1
Higher Executive Officer (engineering: production)	0	0	0	1
Higher Executive Officer (engineering: professional and technological construction)	0	0	0	2
Higher Executive Officer (engineering: tele-communications) +	97	93	9	9
Higher Executive Officer (science)	8	8	5	8
Higher Executive Officer (science: computer science)	3	1	0	0
Higher Executive Officer (science: forensics[1])	139	0	2	2
Higher Executive Officer (science: operational research)	4	4	4	3
Higher Executive Officer (science: physics)	15	12	13	11
Higher Executive Officer (science: social science)	2	1	0	0
Higher Executive Officer (science: life science)	1	0	0	1
Higher Executive Officer (research: social science)	9	8	14	15
Higher Executive Officer (statistics)	7	8	8	7
Executive Officer (engineering: building)	1	1	1	1
Executive Officer (engineering: civil)	1	1	0	0
Executive Officer (engineering: electronic)	4	3	3	3
Executive Officer (engineering: mechanical)	3	2	2	1
Executive Officer (engineering: production)	1	1	1	0
Executive Officer (engineering: tele-communications)[2]	192	197	0	1
Executive Officer (science)	9	9	10	7
Executive Officer (science: computer science)	1	1	0	1
Executive Officer (science: physics)	2	2	2	2
Executive Officer (science: life science)	2	2	2	1
Executive Officer (science: mathematics/statistics)	0	0	0	1
Executive Officer (statistics)	2	1	1	1
Administrative Officer (science)	6	5	5	4
Administrative Officer (science: forensic)[1]	82	0	0	0
Administrative Officer (statistics)	1	1	0	0
Administrative Assistant (science: forensic)[1]	1	0	0	0

[1]Reduction reflects establishments of the Forensic Science Service as an executive agency.

[2]Reduction reflects the privatisation of Directorate of Telecommunications.

Departmental Staff Guidelines

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines his Department provides regarding employees and recent ex-employees taking up positions with companies tendering for his Department's contracts. [19677]

Mr. Howard: All staff who are offered employment within two years of leaving Crown service—or outside normal working hours while still in the service—by organisations with which they have had official dealings must apply for approval under the business appointment rules. The rules are set out in standing guidance to staff and also in the civil service management code; they are part of all civil servants' conditions of service. Staff are reminded of the rules when they join the Department and on leaving the civil service.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are currently adopted in Buckley Hall prison to stop the smuggling into the prison

of *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* cannabis and other illegal drugs and *(c)* other items; and what plans there are to increase the number of searches carried out on (i) male and (ii) female prison visitors. [19793]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 11 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the procedures currently adopted at Buckley Hall prison to stop smuggling, and whether there are any plans to increase the number of searches carried out on both male and female prison visitors.

Every visitor to Buckley Hall prison is already searched before being allowed to visit a prisoner. In addition all visitors are required to pass through a metal detector portal. Procedures for the regular searching of staff are also in place.

Other procedures at Buckley Hall prison to prevent any attempt to smuggle alcohol, cannabis, other illegal drugs or any other items into the prison are extensive. These include the searching of all items accompanying visitors which may hold illicit items. Items taken into the visiting room are x-rayed and there is camera and video monitoring of visits.

Prevention of Terrorism Acts

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many exclusion orders under the prevention of terrorism Acts are still in force. [20313]

Mr. Howard: There are currently 33 people subject to exclusion orders, 29 from Great Britain and four from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been released without charge after being *(a)* arrested and *(b)* detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts for each calendar year since 1974. [20315]

Mr. Howard: The figures relate to persons arrested and/or detained under section 14 or schedule 5 to the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. The table additionally shows numbers for those detainees who, although not charged, were subsequently made the subject of exclusion orders, were deported, or removed under the Immigration Act 1971.

Great Britain

Year	*Detained*	*Not charged*	*Excluded, deported or removed*
1974 (from 29 November)	59	51	12
1975	1,067	1,004	46
1976	1,066	1,009	23
1977	853	806	17
1978	622	603	49
1979	857	749	48
1980	537	495	45
1981	274	235	10
1982	220	198	11
1983	191	160	13
1984	203	172	14
1985	266	205	12
1986	202	166	16
1987	225	200	24
1988	186	165	16
1989	181	160	12
1990	193	165	16
1991	153	146	11
1992	160	120	1
1993	152	120	4
1994	61	52	4
1995	34	21	0

Northern Ireland

Year	*Detained*	*Not charged*
1989	1,583	1,223
1990	1,549	1,179
1991	1,680	1,294
1992	1,795	1,335
1993	1,641	1,259
1994	1,503	11,136
1995	443	335

Figures for Northern Ireland are readily available only from 1989: those prior to then could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been subject to exclusion orders under the prevention of terrorism Acts for each calendar year since 1974. [20312]

Mr. Howard: Figures for exclusion orders are set out in the lists.

Great Britain

1974: 19[1]
1975: 50
1976: 24
1977: 18
1978: 53
1979: 53
1980: 49
1981: 11
1982: 15
1983: 15
1984: 3
1985: 7
1986: 9
1987: 19
1988: 20
1989: 9
1990: 16
1991: 11
1992: 2
1993: 7
1994: 4
1995: 0

[1] From 29 November

Northern Ireland

1974: 0[1]
1975: 1
1976: 1
1977: 0

1978: 2
1979: 4
1980: 3
1981: 11
1982: 2
1983: 4
1984: 2
1985: 0
1986: 0
1987: 1
1988: 1
1989: 1
1990: 0
1991: 0
1992: 0
1993: 0
1994: 1
1995: 0
[1]From 29 November.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* arrested and *(b)* detained under the prevention of terrorism Acts for each calendar year since 1974; and if he will give a breakdown of the lengths of detention. [20314]

Mr. Howard: The figures relate to persons arrested and/or detained under section 14 or schedule 5 to the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. Detentions under 48 hours can be authorised by the police. Those over 48 hours must be authorised by the Secretary of State.

In Great Britain

	Under 48 hours	*Over 48 hours*
1974 (from 29 November)	13	46
1975	930	137
1976	1,006	60
1977	824	29
1978	599	23
1979	617	240
1980	411	126
1981	216	58
1982	183	37
1983	146	45
1984	163	40
1985	172	94
1986	145	57
1987	174	51
1988	161	25
1989	145	36
1990	158	35
1991	123	30
1992	143	17
1993	113	39
1994	57	4
1995	16	18

In Northern Ireland

	Under 48 hours	*Over 48 hours*
1974 (from 29 November)	0	0
1975	3	5
1976	44	202
1977	39	123
1978	7	144
1979	36	126
1980	36	186
1981	94	401
1982	189	639
1983	447	728
1984	375	533
1985	381	557
1986	825	484
1987	1,008	451
1988	1,175	542
1989	1,053	530
1990	1,089	460
1991	1,109	571
1992	1,354	441
1993	1,186	455
1994	1,119	384
1995	431	12

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes have taken place in the terms of reference of the Lloyd review of the prevention of terrorism acts since the resumption of violence connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland. [20316]

Mr. Howard: None.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19905]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* Neither Capita Managed Services nor Lusis Business Solutions is currently involved in bidding for any of the projects listed.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Crashes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* the Royal Navy Sea Harrier T4 which crashed near Wellington, Somerset, on 23 February and *(b)* the Royal Air Force Tornado GR1 which crashed near Issam, Germany, on 26 February last has a major service; who carried it out; and if he will make a statement. [19312]

Mr. Soames: All Royal Navy and Royal Air Force aircraft are maintained in accordance with the appropriate authorised servicing cycle and approved maintenance procedures. Harrier T Mk 4 XZ445 underwent its last scheduled basic maintenance, the deepest appropriate level of maintenance, in 1994. This was carried out by the Maintenance Group Defence Agency at RAF St. Athan. The aircraft's last scheduled servicing was carried out on the parent squadron in January 1996. The servicing policy

for RAF Tornados was explained in my answer to the hon. Member on 8 March 1996, *Official Report*, columns *368-69*.

Tornado GR1 ZD845's last major servicing was carried out in August 1995 at the operating unit. The separate boards of inquiry into these aircraft losses are on-going; a summary of the board's findings will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current damage and repair status of Tornado GR1 serial number ZD844; what repair work is schedules for this aircraft; where such repairs will be carried out; and what is the expected date of re-entry to service of this aircraft. [19756]

Mr. Soames: Tornado GR1 ZD844 was involved in a mid-air collision over Canada on 1 August 1994. The aircraft, which landed safely, sustained varying degrees of damage to the left-hand engine intake, engine bay door, main landing gear, fuselage and left wing. Repairs to the damaged wing are being carried out by the Maintenance Group Defence Agency at RAF St. Athan. Repairs to the fuselage are being undertaken using service manpower at RAF Marham. It is expected that ZD844 will re-enter service in 1997.

Dismissals (Drug Offences)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel have been *(a)* charged with drug offences and *(b)* subsequently dismissed for such offences in each of the last 10 years. [19486]

Mr. Soames: The information is not available in the format requested, but we are able to provide the following information for the nine-year period 1986 to 1994:

(a) The number of armed forces personnel convicted of drug offences:

1986: 131
1987: 145
1988: 105
1989: 196
1990: 339
1991: 426
1992: 612
1993: 513
1994: 296

(b) The number subsequently dismissed[1] for such offences:

1986: 60
1987: 56
1988: 67
1989: 68
1990: 118
1991: 165
1992: 225
1993: 152
1994: 112

[1]The figures relate to those sentenced to dismissal from service at court martial, summary trial or were dismissed following a sentence of imprisonment from a service or civilian court.

Empty Properties

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MOD properties in Hampshire are currently empty; and if he will indicate the number of properties in each local authority area. [19623]

Mr. Soames: No central record is maintained of the number of buildings other than married quarters which may be empty at any given time. At 7 March 1996, there were 831 married quarters in the following council areas:

	Number
East Hampshire DC	53
Fareham DC	21
Gosport BC	238
Hart DC	22
Havant DC	20
Portsmouth CC	142
Ruchmoor BC	120
Test Valley BC	101
Winchester CC	63
New Forest DC	51

Married Quarters Discounted Sale Scheme

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) of 1 March, *Official Report*, column *766*, how many personnel will be eligible for the interest-free advance scheme; and if personnel made redundant between 1 March and 1 August will be eligible for the scheme. [19833]

Mr. Soames: Some 23 per cent. of Army and RAF personnel will qualify by age for the long service advance of pay scheme, but significantly fewer personnel are expected to join the scheme because the pattern of service in the Army and RAF promotes accompanied service and this can deter home ownership in some circumstances.

The Royal Navy has enjoyed the benefits of LSAP since 1963 and, because of the pattern of family separation which is inherent in a sea-going service, it has promoted a housing policy which does not differentiate between accompanied or unaccompanied service when ashore. The historical take-up rate of LSAP in the RN is approximately 40 per cent. of all eligible personnel, and represent an annual maximum uptake of 1,500 personnel. Although take-up figures can be only speculative, the RN trends, with the differing age qualifications and accompanied service preferences of the Army and RAF, would indicate an average of 1,200 new LSAP members each year. This would represent a threefold increase over those who have annually benefited from the married quarters discounted sales scheme.

Army or RAF personnel made redundant between now and 1 August 1996 will not be able to take advantage of the scheme. They will, however, still be able to apply to purchase a home under the married quarter discounted sales scheme, which will remain in force until 1 August 1996.

Abbey Wood

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer of 5 March, *Official Report*,

column 141, what additional payments have been claimed by the construction contractors for the new MOD building at Abbey Wood. [20087]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We respect the commercial in confidence nature of contractual and claims issues which are between the Department and the contractors concerned. As is our normal practice, claims against the Department are reviewed and processed in accordance with the contract terms—action which has and is being taken in respect of claims submitted by the shell and core contractor. As I have said, there is a constructive dialogue going on between the Department and the contractor. Both the contractor and the Department are working positively to realise the project's programme objectives.

Future Large Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his French counterpart concerning the future large aircraft programme. [20196]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I met Henri Conzé, délegué général pour l'armement on Friday 1 March. The future large aircraft programme was discussed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has not recently discussed the future large aircraft programme with his French counterpart.

Scott Inquiry

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes his Department will introduce in relation to defence exports following the Scott inquiry report. [20197]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department will participate fully in the review of the Government's existing export control powers and procedures being undertaken by the Department of Trade and Industry. In addition, my Department will take the lead in the review of the convention on the disclosure of information about defence exports.

Otterburn Training Area

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what alternative courses of action from those listed in "Improving the Training Infrastructure at Otterburn Training Area: The MOD's Aspirations for the Next Five Years" were considered in environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department; [19528]

(2) what procedures have been put in place by his Department to monitor the environmental impacts arising from the implementation of "Improving the Training Infrastructure at Otterburn Training Area: The MOD's Aspirations for the Next Five Years"; [19530]

(3) if "Improving the Training Infrastructure at Otterburn Training Area: The MOD's Aspirations for the Next Five Years" has been subject to an environmental appraisal using the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" produced by the Department of the Environment; [19527]

(4) how "Improving the Training Infrastructure at Otterburn Training Area: The MOD's Aspirations for the Next Five Years" was modified by the results the environmental appraisals undertaken by his Department. [19529]

Mr. Soames: The Ministry of Defence document to which the hon. Member refers was produced at the request of the Northumberland national park authority. It sets out my Department's aspirations for improving the infrastructure at Otterburn training area for the next five years and describes the positive planning principles the Ministry of Defence has adopted for taking these forward. It will be used to take forward our discussions with the park authority under the normal planning arrangements in Department of the Environment circular 18/84. None of the aspirations has yet been agreed, and each remains subject to internal scrutiny, funding, and planning consent.

My Department's aim, through this forward-looking document, is to provide the national park authority with a clearer understanding of the likely trend of development, against which they will be better placed to judge the acceptability or otherwise of individual development applications. Full environmental appraisals will be undertaken as appropriate, and these will take due account of all relevant environmental considerations and where necessary draw upon Government policy and guidance as contained in documents such as the Department of the Environment's "Policy Appraisal and the Environment".

SCOTLAND

Railway Investment

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what applications for railway investment have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* submitted for consideration to the highland and Islands development partnership since objective 1 status was announced. [19330]

Mr. Kynoch: None.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if railway capital investment in the highlands is eligible for EC objective 1 funding. [19331]

Mr. Kynoch: In principle, applications may be eligible, but this would depend on the precise nature of the project.

Orthopaedic Trauma Surgery

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many orthopaedic trauma operations have been carried out in Edinburgh for each month since January 1995 to the present; how many such patients had to wait more than two days for surgery after sustaining a fracture; if he will express the numbers waiting for more than two days, as a percentage of the number of operations carried out; and if he will give the monthly budget for such operations; [19558]

(2) what evaluation he has made of the adequacy of available theatre time to cope with demands for orthopaedic trauma surgery at peak periods. [19559]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of orthopaedic trauma operations carried out in Edinburgh, the number of patients who wait more than two days for surgery after sustaining a fracture and the monthly budget for such operations is not held centrally. The table sets out the number of discharges, admitted as emergencies, from orthopaedics who received an operation for each month in 1995 in Edinburgh NHS hospitals showing the percentage and number waiting more than two days. The data are provisional. The availability of theatre time to cope with demand for orthopaedic traumatic surgery is a matter for the NHS trusts concerned.

Emergency admissions[1] to orthopaedic surgery, receiving an operation, by pre-operative stay and month of discharge NHS hospitals in Edinburgh[2], for calendar year 1995[3]

	Month of Discharge					
	January	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*
Pre-operative stay						
0–2 days						
Number	240	244	256	254	227	259
Percentage	94.5	95.7	94.5	93.7	86.6	87.8
3+ days						
Number	14	11	15	17	35	36
Percentage	5.5	4.3	5.5	6.3	13.4	12.2
Total						
Number	254	255	271	271	262	295
Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100

	Month of discharge						
	July	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*Total*
Pre-operative stay							
0–2 days							
Number	228	231	283	287	245	192	2,946
Percentage	91.9	93.9	88.4	92.0	88.1	81.7	90.7
3+ days							
Number	20	15	37	25	33	43	301
Percentage	8.1	6.1	11.6	8.0	11.9	18.3	9.3
Total							
Number	248	246	320	312	278	235	3,247
Percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

[1] Day case, out-patient and accident and emergency attendances are excluded.
[2] The hospitals included in the above table are: Princess Margaret Rose orthopaedic hospital, Royal Hospital for sick children, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.
[3] 1995 data are provisional.

Transport Funding

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amounts of objective 1 funding has been approved in the Highlands and Islands so far for *(a)* roads and road transport, *(b)* airports and air transport, *(c)* ferries and *(d)* railways. [19327]

Mr. Kynoch: The information is set out in the table:

Sector	*Number of projects*	*European Regional Development Award £ million*
Roads	32	14.35
Ferries	2	1.75
Airports	1	0.32
Railways	0	0

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what grounds the last general manager of Lothian health board left that position. [19345]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The last board general manager of Lothian health retired early on grounds of ill health.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the resourcing and administrative arrangements for the secretariat dealing with the distribution of European structural funds in Scotland; on what date the independent secretariat was established; what is the number of full-time equivalent employees involved in its administration; and what

representations he has received from infrastructure providers and others in relation to the present arrangements. [19361]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* Of the seven structural fund programmes operating in Scotland, four are administered by programme executives. Infrastructure providers and others in areas with programme executives appear to be generally content with the arrangements; and any discussions about their operation have tended to focus on various detailed points. Details of the resourcing and administration arrangements for dealing with the funds in Scotland are as follows:

Programme executives

The Strathclyde European Partnership

Established—June 1989

Staff number—16 full-time equivalent—FTE

Highlands and Islands Partnership

Established—February 1994

Staff number—eight FTE

Eastern Scotland European Partnership

Established—January 1995

Staff number—8.8 FTE

Dumfries and Galloway European Partnership

Established—November 1994

Staff number—3.5 FTE.

European Social Fund

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for changing the administration of the European social fund in Scotland; what is the number of full-time equivalent employees required to administer the funds under *(a)* present and *(b)* future arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [19362]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland accepted responsibility for the administration of the European social fund on 1 January 1994 for objective 1, 2 and 5b programme areas. Responsibility for the objective 3 programme and EC community initiatives was transferred on 1 April 1995. These major changes have required new administrative arrangements, which we are keeping under review to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

Presently, there are 12 full-time equivalent employees, in the Scottish Office and nine full-time equivalent employees in the four programme executives involved in the administration of the funds.

Falkirk Football Club

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will instruct the reporter to expedite the report of the public inquiry on the planning application by Falkirk football club for a new stadium, to enable the club to meet the deadline for implementation of the Taylor report requirement for all-seater stadia. [15543]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* The reporter is aware of the requirements of the Taylor report for all-seater stadia. For that reason, this case has been given—and will continue to receive—priority.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the report of the public inquiry on the planning application by Falkirk football club for a new stadium. [15544]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* Depending on the extent, nature and content of comments received following circulation to parties of part I of the report, my right hon. Friend expects to receive the final report by the end of the first week in May.

NORTHERN IRELAND

School Pupils (Strangford)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils there *(a)* are this year and *(b)* were last year at each primary school in the constituency of Strangford. [18932]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

Strangford

School name	*(a) 1995–96*	*(b) 1994–95*
Abbey PS	590	558
Alexander Dickson PS	215	216
Andrews Memorial PS	522	523
Ballykeigle PS	59	61
Ballyvester PS	92	97
Ballywalter PS	153	141
Belvoir Park PS	394	383
Braniel PS	417	409
Cairnshill PS	474	457
Carrickmannon PS	82	79
Carrowdore PS	133	126
Castle Gardens PS	408	414
Comber PS	394	398
Cottown PS	—	23
Donaghadee PS	479	459
Greyabbey PS	70	72
Killinchy PS	243	233
Killyleagh PS	146	157
Kircubbin PS	68	58
Kirkistown PS	58	54
Leadhill PS	206	201
Londonderry PS	315	317
Lough View Integrated PS	93	51
Loughries PS	89	88
Millisle PS	172	180
Moneyrea PS	136	126
Newtownards Model PS	388	376
Newtownbreda PS	230	232
O'Neill Memorial PS	41	36
Portaferry PS	54	43
Portavogie PS	132	143
Regent House School	165	175
St. Anne's PS	49	37
St. Finian's PS	161	174
St. Mary's PS, Portaferry	281	308
St. Mary's PS, Comber	39	32
St. Mary's PS, Ballygowan	50	54
St. Mary's PS, Kirkcubbin	224	228
St. Patrick's PS	104	98
Victoria PS (Newtownards)	553	543
Victoria PS (Ballyhalbert)	106	104
West Winds PS	181	194

Cottown Primary School closed 31 August 1995.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils there *(a)* are this year and *(b)* were last year at each secondary school of all categories in the constituency of Strangford. [18934]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

School Name	*(a) 1995–96*	*(b) 1994–95*
Comber High School	422	424
Donaghadee High School	254	283
Glastry High School	560	573
Lagan College	933	917
Movilla High School	834	799
Regent House School	1,444	1,445
Scrabo High School	309	325
St. Columba's High School	348	342

Regent House Grammar School, Newtownards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pupils there are at Regent House grammar school, Newtownards; how many temporary classrooms there are at the school; how many applicants there were for entry into form 1 in the current year; how many pupils were enrolled into form 1 in the current year; what proposals there are to provide permanent classrooms at the school; and if he will make a statement. [18936]

Mr. Ancram: Regent House school has 1,444 pupils in its secondary department and 165 pupils in its preparatory department. The school has 31 temporary classrooms. It had 217 applicants for entry into form 1 for 1995–96—figures for 1996–97 are not yet available—and has 215 pupils in form 1 this year.

I understand that the south-eastern education and library board is developing plans to extend and refurbish the existing premises.

Leadhill Primary School

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the enrolment in each of the past five years at Leadhill primary school; what is the expected enrolment at the school in each of the next five years; when was the last capital investment for extra accommodation at Leadhill primary school; what proposals there are for the provision of further accommodation at this school; and if he will make a statement. [18933]

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

1990: 175

1991: 172

1992: 179

1993: 187

1994: 201

1995: 206.

Enrolments over the next five years are expected to be around 220.

The last capital investment for extra accommodation at the school was in 1984: and I understand that the south-eastern education and library board is currently considering the provision of a purpose-built three classroom block for the school.

Dundonald Primary School

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the enrolment in each of the past five years at Dundonald primary school; what is the expected enrolment at the school in each of the next five years; what proposals there are to provide additional accommodation at the school; how many places in primary 1 will be available in the next academic year; how many applicants there are for places in primary 1 at the school for the next academic year; and if he will make a statement. [18935]

Mr. Ancram: The enrolments in each of the past five years are as follows:

Year	*Number of pupils enrolled*	*Number of applicants refused places*[1]
1991–92	537 (at January 1991)	n/a
1992–93	558 (at October 1992)	none
1993–94	563 (at October 1993)	14
1994–95	547 (at October 1994)	5
1995–96	553 (at October 1995)	9

[1] Information available only from 1992–93 onwards.

It is not possible to accurately project an enrolment figure for each of the next five years.

Provision of controlled primary school places in Dundonald is the responsibility of the South Eastern education and library board. I understand that the board has no plans to increase the size of Dundonald primary school at present, but it is reviewing demand for primary schools places in the Dundonald area and is monitoring residential development as part of its consideration of future primary school provision.

The approved admissions number for the 1996–97 school year is 81; but the school has discretion to admit a maximum of five pupils above this number. The school has received 91 applications.

Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the addresses of the proposed six offices of the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency; and if these offices will *(a)* be at ground floor level or *(b)* provide access by a lift. [19935]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency under its chief executive Mr. Brian Watson. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. B. Watson to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 7 March 1996:

Your Question about the location of Driver & Vehicle Testing Agency offices has been referred to me for reply.

Theory test centres will be located in Ballymena, Belfast, Londonderry, Newry, Omagh and Portadown. The addresses of the centres will be published when suitable premises have been acquired.

It is expected that theory test centres will either be at ground floor level or that appropriate arrangements will be made for disabled candidates.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Office Facilities

Mr. MacShane: To ask the right hon. Member or Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what steps he is taking to ensure adequate office facilities for hon. Members. [18032]

Mr. Beith: The new parliamentary building will provide offices for 208 hon. Members. It will also accommodate at least the same number of Members' support staff.

Until the new building is opened in 1999, every effort is being made to improve Members' office facilities as part of the building refurbishment programme, which includes the installation of the parliamentary data and video network and the clean feed from the Chamber as well as more telephone lines.

EU Legislation

38. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has had concerning the preparation and scrutiny of European legislation. [18030]

Mr. Newton: The Select Committee on European Legislation published a report in July 1995 on the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. This addressed a number of issues including the European Community's legislative process and the arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny of European Community legislation. The Government responded to the report in November and look forward to receiving a further report from the Committee focusing in more detail on parliamentary scrutiny arrangements.

Central and Members' Lobbies

39. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will review the names of the Central and Members' Lobbies. [18031]

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Libya and Iraq (Sanctions)

40. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set up a Select Committee to examine the policy of UN sanctions against Libya and Iraq. [18033]

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Office Allowances

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on future office allowances for hon. Members. [18026]

Mr. Newton: As I announced on 6 February, *Official Report*, columns *101–2*, the Senior Salaries Review Body has been asked to undertake a review of the whole matter of Members' pay and allowances. In the meantime, under the existing resolution, the office costs allowance will increase automatically with effect from 1 April by reference to the retail prices index.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the total cost of each of the sittings of the Scottish Grand Committee held in Scotland during this Parliament; and what is the estimated cost of the future sittings in Scotland planned for this parliamentary Session for *(a)* accommodation for Members, *(b)* travel for Members and *(c)* other costs. [17776]

Mr. Newton: My responsibility in this area is limited to the reimbursement to extended travel, although information on this is not collected in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Accommodation and other costs associated with the work of the Scottish Grand Committee are the responsibility of the House of Commons Commission.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in the headquarters division of the Overseas Development Administration in each year from 1991 to the current year. [19799]

Mr. Hanley: Information is not held in the form requested. The figures cover professional scientists and engineers employed by ODA in each year, including a small number seconded to other organisations:

	Grade 3	*Grade 5*	*Grade 6*	*Grade 7*	*Below G7*	*Total*
1991						
Science	2	10	35	50	15	112
Engineering	—	1	9	8	—	19
1992						
Science	2	11	38	42	12	105
Engineering	—	1	9	8	—	18
1993						
Science	2	12	43	41	13	111
Engineering	—	1	8	8	—	17
1994						
Science	2	12	41	53	11	119
Engineering	—	1	8	8	—	17
1995						

	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Below G7	Total
Science	2	12	39	50	11	114
Engineering	—	1	10	6	—	17

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British companies were awarded contracts under the aid and trade provision; and how much ATP money was disbursed on each contract, connected with *(a)* the Botswana flight information region project approved in 1988, *(b)* the television studio in Indonesia approved in 1985 and *(c)* the metro in Ankara approved in 1990. [19962]

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Project	Company	ATP disbursement (£ million)
Flight Information Region Project (Botswana)	Siemens Plessey Radar	2.936
Bandung Television Studio Project (Indonesia)	Quantel Link Systems	2.906
Ankara Metro Project (Turkey)	Coppee UK/Westinghouse Brakes	6.334

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many aid and trade provision projects for which all Overseas Development Administration payments were made before 10 November 1994 fall outside the interpretation of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 given in the judgments in the divisional court on that day in relation to the Pergau hydro-electric project; and if he will list these projects, the British companies awarded contracts in relation to these projects and the amount of aid and trade provision aid spent on each of those contracts. [20006]

Mr. Hanley: Three projects were pronounced to have fallen outside the interpretation of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 in the judgment relating to the Pergau hydro-electric project.

The projects are listed.

Project	Company	Disbursement (£ millions)
Flight Information Region Project (Botswana)	Siemens Plessey Radar	2.936
Bandung Television Studio Project (Indonesia)	Quantel Link Systems	2.906
Ankara Metro Project (Turkey)	Coppee UK/Westinghouse Brakes	6.334

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each contract awarded under the aid and trade provision since its inception in 1978 to *(a)* Trafalgar House, including Davy and John Brown Engineering, *(b)* Balfour Beatty, *(c)* Rolls-Royce, including NEI, and *(d)* Biwater, specifying the date each contract was awarded and its cash value. [19943]

Mr. Hanley: Since its inception in 1978 the following aid and trade provision projects have been awarded to *(a)* Trafalgar House, including Davy and John Brown Engineering, *(b)* Balfour Beatty, *(c)* Rolls-Royce, including Northern Engineering Industries and *(d)* Biwater:

Project	Date of contract	ATP allocation (£ millions)
(A) Trafalgar House, including Davy and John Brown Engineering		
Sicartsa Steel Plate Mill (Mexico)	8 March 1982	34.945
Brake Block Foundry (Egypt)	15 July 1986	0.635
Chongquing Power Station (China)	17 May 1988	6.500
Bohai Aluminium Mill I (China)	19 October 1988	8.802
Danyang Aluminium Plant (China)	11 December 1990	3.532
Cigading/Serpong Railway (Indonesia)	15 March 1990	24.690
Tetouan Gas Turbines (Morocco)	11 June 1993	10.925
Cikampek-Cirebon Double Track Railway (Indonesia)	27 February 1995	15.010
Nador Roll Mill (Morocco)	14 April 1981	13.505
Haipon Power Station (Vietnam)	12 February 1979	2.888
Gas Turbines Project (Burma)	3 April 1980	3.201
Gas Turbines Project (Burma)	6 August 1982	2.213
Kipevu Power Station (Kenya)	29 August 1986	1.959
Shengli Power Plant (China)	17 March 1987	4.247
Gas Turbine Power Station (Panama)	30 October 1987	6.727
Gas Turbines Power Station (Philippines)	2 May 1989	13.125
Gas Turbines (Morocco)	2 February 1990	7.276
(B) Balfour Beatty		
Wood Burning Power Station (Philippines)	3 September 1980	1.967
Nini Hydros (Philippines)	12 March 1980	4.610
Railway Electrification (Zimbabwe)	30 July 1980	2.931
Bridges Project (Colombia)	16 December 1981	0.300
Power Transmission Scheme (Paraguay)	3 December 1981	2.870
Power Transmission Scheme (Paraguay)	7 July 1982	1.350
Mini Hydro Project (Peru)	5 August 1982	4.843
Mini Hydro Project (Indonesia)	22 October 1982	12.075
Bridge Project (Burma)	8 March 1983	0.090
Bridge Project Extension (Colombia)	30 July 1984	0.152
HV Transmission Line (Jordan)	19 February 1984	3.611

Project	Date of contract	ATP allocation (£ millions)
Sungei Ashning Dam (Malaysia)	28 December 1984	2.344
Ascuncion Sewerage Consultancy (Paraguay)	21 December 1984	0.950
Dendro Power Station Adviser (Philippines)	21 February 1984	0.040
Mini Hydros Pilot Plant (Thailand)	8 August 1984	3.200
Bukit Asam Rail Bridges (Indonesia)	15 July 1984	0.152
Samanala Wewa Hydro Project (Sri Lanka)	24 April 1986	16.570
N. W. Electrification (Cameroon)	24 February 1987	1.795
Power Transmission (Malawi)	12 June 1987	2.590
Yue Yang Transmission Line (China)	16 December 1988	3.072
Karachi Water II Consultancy (Pakistan)	25 July 1988	1.360
Railway Equipment (Tunisia)	30 August 1989	0.500
Beijing Subway (China)	16 May 1990	9.987
Pergau Hydro Electric Project (Malaysia)	8 July 1991	24.370
Mini Hydros (Thailand)	17 August 1994	4.121
(C) Rolls Royce (including NEI)		
Electricity Generation Project (Egypt)	29 October 1979	10.020
Dhekelia B Power Station (Cyprus)	30 August 1980	0.366
Rihand I Super Thermal Power Plant (India)	17 November 1982	17.034
Morupule Power Station Turbines (Botswana)	26 September 1983	4.418
Sandakan Power Station (Malaysia)	6 November 1988	0.929
Connaught Bridge (Malaysia)	3 December 1990	23.485
Samarinda Power Station (Indonesia)	6 March 1996	12.568
(D) Biwater		
Rural Water Supply Scheme (Malaysia)	29 August 1986	59.460
Hill Country Water (Sri Lanka)	29 December 1988	2.129

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19037]

The Attorney-General: No equipment or furniture has been stolen from my own office in the past five years nor from the Government Property Lawyers Agency since its inception on 1 April 1993. The number of items and cost of equipment and furniture stolen from the Treasury Solicitor's Department, Serious Fraud Office and the Crown Prosecution Service is stated in the table. No item was valued at £5,000 or more.

	IT equipment stolen		Non-IT equipment and furniture stolen	
	Items	£	Items	£
1991	6	8,300	1	400
1992	24	33,627	6	2,000
1993	19	16,930	11	1,114
1994	12	10,051	17	5,116
1995	8	13,608	17	6,904

Two non-IT items, costing in total £1,300, were otherwise unaccounted for from the Serious Fraud Office in 1995. No other items were otherwise unaccounted for in the past five years from the departments and agency for which I am responsible.

UNSCOM Report

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Attorney-General what prosecutions will follow the UN special commission on Iraq—UNSCOM—report on the involvement of British companies in supplying the Iraqi programmes developing weapons of mass destruction. [20085]

The Attorney-General: I understand any information contained in an UNSCOM report indicating possible unlawful supply of weapons to Iraq will have been passed to HM Customs and Excise. Follow-up to any information about, and investigation of, any suspected breaches of UK export controls will be a matter for that Department. Decisions about prosecution are taken in the light of the outcome of such investigations.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Deregulation

Mr. Deva: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress is being made towards the formulation of a model appeals mechanism as provided for under section 6 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. [20447]

Mr. Freeman: I am today issuing for consultation a draft statutory instrument setting out the model provisions. The model appeal mechanism is designed to provide a fair and independent process for resolving disputes about enforcement across a wide range of policy areas. It provides for problems to be ironed out at the earliest stage by giving a right to be warned before enforcement action is taken, and a chance to make representations to challenge proposed enforcement action, unless immediate action is necessary. It will also require enforcers to give reasons for taking action and explain how an appeal can be made. These rights have already been applied to health and safety regulations and will shortly be applied to environmental standards, food safety and building regulations, with a range of consumer affairs legislation to follow.

The model appeal mechanism provides for appeals to be considered on the merits of the case by a three person panel. Common procedural rules would apply to all enforcement appeals with time limits and active case

management to ensure a simple, speedy and inexpensive process. I have arranged for copies of the consultation paper to be placed in the Library of the House.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the estimated cost of maintaining the deregulation unit within the Cabinet Office; and how many permanent staff are employed in it. [18646]

Mr. Freeman: The cost of the deregulation unit was set out in the annual MINIS 95 return for the Department of Trade and Industry, as the unit was at that stage part of that Department. The return was published on 12 June 1995 and a copy placed in the Library of the House.

The staff complement of the deregulation unit at January 1996 was equivalent to 43.5 man years.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what vehicles carrying calves were loaded on ships at Dover bound for French and Belgian ports on 8 February 1995; and what was the declared country of destination on each journey plan and the health certification for the purposes of the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1995. [15716]

Mrs. Browning: Scheduled ferry operators announced their intention to stop carrying farm animals for further fattening, or immediate slaughter, in 1994. No specialist livestock ships operated from Dover before 20 April 1995.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19414]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The number of letters to which I, or my predecessors, have asked executive agencies to reply during the last five calendar years are as follows:

Year	*Number*	*As a percentage of all letters from hon. Members or Peers*
1991	234	2.35
1992	357	3.25
1993	475	4.26
1994	872	9.24
1995	828	9.70

The answer to the vast majority of such letters were partially or wholly prepared by agencies but signed by MAFF Ministers.

(b) Parliamentary questions are not passed to chief executives, although chief executives are asked to write to the Member concerned when the question seeks information about operational matters delegated to them.

The number of questions for which I, or my predecessors, have asked executive agencies to respond to by letter are as follows:

Parliamentary Session	*Number*	*As a percentage of all questions*
1993–94	6	0.30
1994–95	35	1.84
1995–96 (to date)	16	2.09

These figures include parliamentary answers where a partial answer has been given by me or my predecessors in respect of the core Department

Figures are not readily available for earlier sessions of Parliament.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the ages of cattle confirmed as having BSE between 6 October 1995 and 29 December 1995. [19354]

Mrs. Browning: The following table shows the age distribution of BSE confirmed cases by age at clinical onset during the period 6 October to 29 December 1995:

Age (years)	*Number*
<2	0
2–3	4
3–4	116
4–5	324
5–6	636
6–7	576
7–8	566
8–9	248
9–10	78
10–11	25
11–12	4
12–13	6
13–14	2
Unknown	136

TRANSPORT

Rail Privatisation

13. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his assessment of the costs of the Government's rail privatisation programme; and if he will make a statement. [18004]

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the costs to public funds of rail privatisation. [18019]

Mr. Watts: Total Government privatisation costs by the end of 1995–96 are estimated to be some £145 million.

Total sale proceeds are in excess of £2 billion.

Maritime Safety

15. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new proposals he has to improve maritime safety. [18007]

Sir George Young: The Government are committed to further improvements in maritime safety, both in the United Kingdom and internationally. We have successfully pursued a range of proposals through the International Maritime Organisation and we will continue to work towards higher standards and their proper implementation. This commitment has been clearly demonstrated recently with regard to roll-on roll-off passenger ferries. Working first through IMO and then with our regional neighbours, we played a leading role in securing agreement to the application of a higher stability standard to ferries operating in north-western Europe.

UK-US Air Services Agreement

16. **Sir Alan Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to resume discussions with the United States Government about the air services agreement between the United Kingdom and the United States. [18008]

Sir George Young: The US suspended formal air services talks in October last year. However, informal contacts are continuing at official level.

Marine Pollution

19. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to take to improve the protection of the marine environment from accidents to oil tankers. [18011]

Sir George Young: In addition to our policies to improve vessel safety, we are committed to ensuring that the United Kingdom has the resources to respond quickly and effectively to marine pollution incidents. We have accepted the vast majority of the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's inquiry into the protection of the marine environment from pollution from ships, and we are implementing those recommendations vigorously.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his assessment of the danger of marine pollution arising from the presence of oil tankers off British coasts; and if he will make a statement. [18018]

Sir George Young: The carriage of any hazardous or polluting cargo by any transport mode inevitably involves some element of risk. The Government remain committed to reducing that risk so far as is possible.

Trunk Road Construction

20. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made on attracting private finance initiative bids to assist trunk road construction. [18012]

Mr. Watts: We have made excellent progress in attracting private finance initiative bids to assist trunk road construction. Industry enthusiasm for the DBFO programme has meant there has been no shortage of bidders and we have already awarded the contract for the A69 and expect to announce the award of other tranche 1 projects shortly.

Royal Train

21. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much Wisconsin Central paid for the royal train. [18013]

Mr. Watts: Wisconsin Central Transportation has not bought the royal train.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the date of manufacture of the royal train locomotive and rolling stock; and what was the purchase price in current prices. [18910]

Mr. Watts: One of two class 47 locomotives—built in the 1960s—owned by Rail Express Systems Ltd, is generally used to haul the royal train, and they are also used for other purposes. The royal train coaches are owned by Railtrack, and were originally manufactured between 1969 and 1986. Apart from four which entered royal train service from new in the mid-1980s, they are all conversions from prototype or redundant coaches. The conversions took place in 1976–97 and between 1988 and 1991. The cost was approximately £10 million at historic prices. The purchase price at current prices is not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, in order of precedence, those members of the royal family entitled to use the royal train on official business. [19343]

Mr. Watts: If on official business, the following members of the royal family are entitled to use the royal train: the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duke of York, the Prince Edward, the Princess Royal, the Princess Margaret, Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the Duke and Duchess of Kent, Prince and Princess Michael of Kent, and Princess Alexandra, the Hon. Lady Ogilvy.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

22. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how long after the inquiry has closed it has taken on average in each of the last 10 major road inquiries for the decision to be announced; and when he expects to announce the decision into the Birmingham northern relief road. [18014]

Mr. Watts: Sixteen months. The decision on the Birmingham northern relief road will be announced when my by right Hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport, have received and considered the inquiry inspector's report.

Railway Investment

23. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans next to meet the chairman of Railtrack to discuss future investment; and if he will make a statement. [18015]

Mr. Watts: My right Hon. Friend has regular meetings with the chairman of Railtrack to discuss all aspects of Railtrack's business. Railtrack's plans for its expenditure on the network are set out in its network management statement, published on 20 December 1995. This document shows that Railtrack is planning to spend over £1 billion per year over the next 10 years.

Bus Deregulation

25. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to review the impact of bus deregulation. [18017]

Mr. Norris: Bus deregulation outside London has meant more bus operators running more bus miles at lower cost than previously, with new buses on many routes, and with greatly reduced public subsidy. The bus working group, which I chair and on which are represented bus operators, local authorities and bus users, has been reviewing the scope for further enhancement of the role of buses in meeting public transport needs, within the deregulated framework. I announced its initial conclusions and a further programme of work on 8 January.

Vehicle Emissions

29. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met representatives of the Freight Transport Association to discuss exhaust emissions from heavy goods vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [18021]

Mr. Norris: My right Hon. Friend has met the Freight Transport Association twice in the past six months but has not discussed with it the subject of exhaust emissions from goods vehicles. Officials of the Department and the Vehicle Inspectorate do, however, hold regular meetings with the FTA to discuss matters of mutual interest, including exhaust emissions.

Blind People (Public Transport)

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Government assistance towards access for blind people to all means of public transport. [18016]

Mr. Norris: The needs of blind and partially sighted people have, over a number of years, been an integral part of the work to improve access to transport for disabled people. Many of the features which are now commonplace on our public transport systems—colour-contrasted step edges and handrails and the use of tactile indicators—have been developed and introduced in consultation with visually impaired people.

The regulations which will be introduced under the transport section of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will build on current developments to ensure that the needs of people with sensory impairments are addressed, in the same way as those of people with physical disabilities. Consultation with disabled people will be an essential element in the development of those regulations.

Rail Safety Standards

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that adequate safety standards are maintained by Railtrack. [18009]

Mr. Watts: We have implemented in full the health and safety commission's recommendations for an enhanced safety regime. The independent Health and Safety Executive will continue to ensure that standards and commitments are met, and will react as necessary.

Chiltern Line

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of rail services on the Chiltern line; and if he will make a statement. [18382]

Mr. Watts: None. Current levels of service are a matter for Chiltern. The franchising director has invited indicative bids for the Chiltern franchise by 22 March. The passenger service requirement, which is the contractually agreed level of service that the franchise operator will be required to provide, was finalised on 22 January following consultation between the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and relevant local authorities—including the London boroughs of Ealing and Brent—and rail users' consultative committees.

London to Colchester Rail Services

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the train operating companies running services between London and Colchester will be taken over by the private sector. [18596]

Mr. Watts: Services between London and Colchester are currently operated by Great Eastern and Anglia. The franchising director issued invitations to pre-qualify for the Anglia franchise on 22 February, and the deadline for expressions of interest is 22 March. Invitations to tender will be issued as soon as is practicable. The Great Eastern franchise will be offered to the private sector in due course.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18647]

Mr. Norris: This information is not collected.

London to Greenwich Transport

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase transport capacity between central London and Greenwich. [18903]

Mr. Norris: Transport links between central London and Greenwich will be substantially improved by both the Jubilee line extension, which is under construction, and the proposed extension of the docklands light railway to Lewisham. Together with members of the River Thames working group, which I chair, the Government are also considering a report by London First on the potential for improving access to Greenwich by boat and ferry services

via the River Thames. We are also considering the responses received to our consultation document on possible river crossings to the east of Tower bridge.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in the headquarters division of his Department in each year from 1991 to the current year. [19792]

Mr. Norris: I will place a table containing the figures in the Library of the House.

Environmental Appraisals

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of Transport if he will publish the result of the environmental appraisal conducted under the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" published by the Department of the Environment on the forthcoming transport policies and programmes circular 1997–98. [19547]

Mr. Norris: The transport policies and programme circular contains guidance to local authorities on their annual TPP submissions, and is not in itself susceptible to environmental appraisal. Environmental considerations play a large part in the development of the Government's local transport policies. For example, we have introduced the package approach to local transport investment, which encourages local authorities to develop alternatives to road building and discourages use of the private car where effective alternatives exist.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the result of the environmental appraisal conducted under the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" published by the Department of the Environment on the forthcoming transport policy paper. [19548]

Mr. Norris: The Government have not yet published their report drawing together the threads of the national debate on transport, so it would be premature to discuss the report's contents.

Buses (London)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for transport what arrangements are in place to ensure that, in central London, bus journeys between the same stops attract the same fares whatever the number of the bus service on the route or the operator; and if he will make a statement. [20240]

Mr. Norris: Fares on London Transport bus services are set by London Transport. With certain exceptions, fares in central London are determined by a zoning system, and are not related to the operator and route. Special fares apply to journeys on night buses, limited stop express services, and the Red Arrow network. For any local service provided independently of the London Transport network, fares would be a matter for individual operators.

M40

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to start on the widening of the M40 between Denham and Loudwater. [19443]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Tim Smith, dated 11 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about widening the M40 between Denham and Loudwater.

As you know, the M40 Junctions 1A to 3 (Denham to Loudwater) widening scheme has been included as part of the larger DBFO project M40 Junctions 1 to 15. Tenders for the DBFO project were invited in June 1995 and bids were received at the end of October. Since then negotiations have been taking place with the tenderers and we would hope to sign a contract with the successful tenderer this summer. On that basis work could still start on the widening in late summer.

I am sorry that I cannot be more precise about the date for the start of works, but that depends on progress with negotiations and the successful tenderer's programme. However, we have included a strong financial incentive in the contract for the contractor to complete the widening as quickly as possible and I expect work to progress speedily once it starts.

Kensington Olympia (Train Marshalling)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of the site at Kensington Olympia where facilities for train marshalling are being provided; and what value was attached to the asset. [20303]

Mr. Norris: The site at Kensington Olympia has been valued during 1995–96 with a historic cost value of £800,000.

English Channel (Collisions)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many collisions were reported in *(a)* the English channel and *(b)* the western approaches in each year since 1987. [20309]

Mr. Norris: Figures for collisions reported to the marine accidents investigation branch are available only from 1991 onwards and are as follows:

Collisions in the English channel

1991: 12

1992: 7

1993: 11

1994: 11

1995: 14

1996: 1 (to date)

Collisions in the western approaches

1991: —

1992: 1

1993: 1

1994: 2

1995: —

1996: — (to date)

Challenge Funding

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce challenge funding into the transport policies and programmes—transport supplementary grant process. [19768]

Mr. Norris: We already incorporate the essential features of the challenge approach in our TPP process, a competitive bidding process which requires local authorities to set out a clear local transport strategy aimed at meeting overarching local objectives, and to prioritise their capital requirements in support of that strategy.

Traffic Flow

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if new roads are required to meet a British Standard with regard to carriageway traffic flow rates. [20043]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 11 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking if new roads should be designed to a British Standard with regards to carriageway traffic flow rates.

No. There is no British Standard for carriageway flow rates.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the clearance work being carried out for the Newbury bypass is on schedule; and if the targets and deadlines for clearance work will be met. [19667]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Rendel, dated 11 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking if clearance work being carried out for the Newbury bypass is on schedule; and if the targets and deadlines for clearance work will be met.

We are broadly on schedule despite the efforts of the protestors. Good progress is being made with felling the trees and shrubs. We may need to carry some work over into the main contract later this year, but we do not anticipate any delays to that contract.

British Rail Freight Business

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken in negotiations with prospective buyers of the British Railways Board's freight businesses to ensure that he complies with section 113 of the Railways Act 1993. [19860]

Mr. Watts: Negotiations with prospective purchasers are a matter for the British Railways Board. My right hon. Friend considers the board's recommendations for disposal in the light of his objectives under section 113 before deciding whether to consent to a sale.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Office of the Rail Regulator and *(c)* the British Railways Board in the reorganisation of the British Railways Board's freight business. [19858]

Mr. Watts: The expenditure by my Department and by the Office of the Rail Regulator on reorganising the British Railways Board's trainload freight division cannot be identified separately, nor could the expenditure by the board without a detailed analysis at disproportionate cost to the board.

Highways Agency

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct the Highways Agency to co-operate with local authorities on preparing package submissions. [19769]

Mr. Watts: No such instruction is necessary—the Highways Agency already discusses trunk road aspects of package submissions with local authorities when requested.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report,* column *150,* if he *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* received valuations of the assets to be transferred to the successful bidder for the channel tunnel rail link. [19940]

Mr. Watts: The bidders in the CTRL competition made their own assessment of the value of these assets as part of the calculation to determine the amount of public sector support they required.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the consortia bidding for the CTRL contract were invited to consider in their submissions a direct link from the CTRL to the west coast main line. [20307]

Mr. Watts: No.

Railway Bridge, Kidsgrove

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on plans to demolish the unused railway bridge in Kidsgrove. [19947]

Mr. Watts: The British Rail Property Board is responsible for several disused railway bridges at Kidsgrove and several others have been sold to the local council. BR has no plans at present to demolish any of the bridges in its ownership.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a list of all overseas visits made by all Ministers of his Department since 1990, including *(a)* details of the places visited and brief reasons for the visit, *(b)* details of the size, composition and cost to public funds of the delegation and *(c)* the names of non-ministerial members of each delegation and the capacity in which each was present. [17492]

Sir George Young: I am placing the information requested in the Library.

London Underground Penalty Fares

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, (1) how many people have had penalty fares waived on appeal by London Underground on the ground

that they had a valid travelcard but had forgotten to take it with them on their journey; and what proportion of people appealing on those grounds this represents; [19508]

(2) how much income has been received by London Underground from penalty fares on travellers who had valid travelcards but had forgotten to take their travelcard on their journey. [19507]

Mr. Norris: London Underground does not generally uphold appeals where the reason for issuing a penalty fare is that the customer has left his or her travelcard at home. This is because travelcard holders are required to carry their tickets with them as proof of their entitlement to travel. However, London Underground has made an exception in some 105 cases—just over 1 per cent. of people appealing on these grounds—where there were extenuating circumstances.

London Underground estimates that it has received £37,600 to date in penalty fares from customers claiming that they had forgotten to take their travelcard with them.

Railtrack (Compensation Agreement)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the compensation agreement between Railtrack and *(a)* InterCity and *(b)* the west coast main line, stating the amount which is payable in compensation for each minute of delay. [19255]

Mr. Watts: This is commercially sensitive information between Railtrack and train operating companies.

Railways (Rolling Stock Maintenance)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are the *(a)* specifications and *(b)* time intervals between maintenance overhauls of InterCity and regional railways engines and coaches; [19253]

(2) what regular maintenance overhauls were carried out and what changes were made to the routine maintenance checks and to the regularity of those checks on the stock involved in *(a)* the Staffordshire and *(b)* the Longsight decoupling incidents in the last three years. [19254]

Mr. Watts: The stock involved in the Staffordshire and Longsight decoupling incidents consisted of InterCity west coast electrically hauled push-pull trains.

The specification for the maintenance and overhaul of Intercity west coast push-pull trains and electric locomotives are laid down in vehicle maintenance and overhaul instructions, originally issued by the InterCity fleet engineer.

A visual safety check of locomotives and coaching stock takes place each day.

For coaching stock, a more detailed safety examination is completed every three to four days, with progressively larger examinations at one, three, six and 12-monthly intervals.

The full vehicle overhaul is mileage based, but occurs approximately every two years.

For locomotives, a more detailed safety examination is completed every 120 hours in traffic equating to 10 to 14 days. There is a range of progressively larger examinations based on hours in traffic.

Locomotive overhaul is also based on hours in traffic, but the regime consists of three types of overhaul occurring approximately at two and three-quarter, five and a half and 11-year intervals respectively.

Similar specifications and frequencies apply to other engines and coaches. The contents of the vehicle maintenance and overhaul instructions are the subject of occasional review. However, British Rail has advised me that the periodicities have not been changed in the last three years.

SOCIAL SECURITY

One-Parent Benefit

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland currently receive *(a)* one-parent benefit without any means-tested benefit and *(b)* one-parent benefit with a means-tested benefit, broken down by each means-tested benefit. [17164]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the following table:

Recipients of one-parent benefit in Scotland

	Number[1] of recipients
Total number receiving one-parent benefit	97,000
Number receiving one-parent benefit with a means-tested benefit (by benefit)[2].	
Income support	38,000
Housing benefit	45,000
Council tax benefit	36,000

1. In Scotland, 34,000 lone parents are in receipt of family credit. It is estimated that the vast majority are also receiving one-parent benefit; however, precise figures are not available.

[1]Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2]It is not possible to provide a breakdown of one-parent benefit recipients between those with and without at least one means-tested benefit because a person can be in receipt of more than one means-tested benefit and not all of the overlaps between benefits can be identified.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the maximum duration of unemployment benefit that claimants will receive if their period of unemployment commences before 8 April and they otherwise meet the conditions of entitlement but are not in receipt of unemployment benefit on this date because they *(a)* are in receipt of a payment in lieu of notice, *(b)* are still within the three-day waiting period, *(c)* have informed the Employment Service of their unemployment before 8 April but are given an appointment with a new client adviser on, or after, this date or have not informed the Employment Service before 8 April of their unemployment but have a good cause for a delayed claim; and if she will make a statement. [17225]

Mr. Roger Evans: The unemployment benefit scheme will continue until it is replaced by jobseeker's allowance on 7 October 1996. Those who are unemployed, entitled to benefit based on their contributions and whose entitlement spans this date will receive days of contribution-based benefit comprising unemployment benefit and jobseeker's allowance.

If a claimant is in receipt of a payment in lieu of notice, or they are within the three-day period, the maximum duration of unemployment benefit they will receive will be 156 days.

There is a maximum of 312 days where unemployment benefit is payable for 6 or 7 April 1996, either because the claim is made before 8 April 1996 or because good cause is accepted for a claim made after that date but in respect of a period before it, and unemployment benefit is also payable for 5 or 6 October 1996. If both of these conditions do not apply the maximum number of days will be 156.

Asbestosis

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the rules governing the payment of industrial injuries compensation to current or former Government employees who contracted asbestosis before 1987. [18303]

Mr. Roger Evans: For the purposes of industrial injuries disablement benefit, crown employees, other than members of Her Majesty's forces, are treated under the same rules as all other employees. Asbestosis has been a prescribed disease since 4 July 1948.

Family Credit

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on public revenues in 1996–97 and 1997–98 of allowing families in receipt of family credit to claim a child care disregard for each dependent child. [18241]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* The estimated cost of disregarding all child care expenses for recipients of family credit would be in the region of £40 million in the long run, with or without allowing for behavioural effects. If all such costs were disregarded, there would be a strong incentive for people who do not pay for child care at the moment to declare some payment. There are about 100,000 people on family credit who would be faced with such an incentive, which could lead to very substantial further costs.

Note:

Estimates based on date 1991–92 and 1993 family expenditure surveys, and the 1994 annual statistical enquiry, uprated to 1996–97 and 1997–98 levels adjusted using data on child care in the 1993–94 family resources survey.

Income Support

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on public revenues in 1996–97 and 1997–98 of allowing income support claimants to disregard work-related child care expenses in calculating income support entitlement. [18235]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* The estimated cost of offsetting work-related child care expenses against earnings in income support is in the region of £10 million for 1996–97 and 1997–98. This figure takes no account of around 50,000 income support claimants who currently have unpaid child care. On the assumption that these people each started to pay £10 a week for child care, the additional cost is estimated to be in the region of £25 million in both years. These figures do not take account of other behavioural changes or of the additional costs of administration.

Note:

Estimates based on data from the 1991–92 and 1993 family expenditure surveys, and the 1994 annual statistical enquiry, uprated to 1996–97 and 1997–98 levels, adjusted using data on child care from the 1993–94 family resource survey.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance he has issued to local authorities about the form in which they record expenses arising from their responsibilities to asylum seekers following the implementation of new regulations on 5 February. [19613]

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

An official in my Department wrote to all directors of housing in English local authorities on 12 February to advise them about information that they could collect. I am placing a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Income Support (Residential Care)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change income support regulations to reflect the changes in capital asset levels for residential long-term care. [18964]

Mr. Roger Evans: Regulation 12 of the Income-Related Benefits (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1996—SI 1996 No. 462—which was laid before the House on 4 March, implements the changes in the capital asset levels for residential long-term care. The regulations come into force on 1 April in relation to housing benefit and 8 April in relation to income support.

Departmental Research

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all Departments for Social Security funded pilots, trials and research studies which have been conducted since 1990 in *(a)* Doncaster, *(b)* Mexborough, *(c)* Doncaster travel-to-work area and *(d)* Mexborough travel-to-work area identifying (i) title, summary and duration of the pilot or trial, (ii) target population and total number of participants and (iii) whether each pilot, trial or research finding was published and the date of publication; and if he will list all other non-DSS research bodies or organisations involved in each pilot, trial or research scheme. [19090]

Mr. Roger Evans: Since 1990, the following research has been carried out in the geographical areas specified:

Target population, number and duration	
1991–95	
Doncaster	
Title	Annual Local Customer Survey
Duration	Several weeks
Target population	All District customers
Participants	10 per cent. of total customer base
Publication	Yes—results held locally
Non-DSS involvement	None
1993	
Mexborough	
Doncaster and Mexborough travel-to-work areas	
Title	Annual Local Customer Survey
Duration	Several weeks
Target population	250 customers
Participants	138 customers
Publication	Yes—results held locally
Non-DSS involvement	None
1994	
Mexborough	
Doncaster and Mexborough travel-to-work areas	
Title	Annual Local Customer Survey
Duration	Several weeks
Target population	1,349 customers
Participants	1,019 customers
Publication	Yes—results held locally
Non-DSS involvement	None
1995	
Mexborough	
Doncaster and Mexborough travel-to-work areas	
Title	Annual Local Customer Survey
Duration	Several weeks
Target population	1,538 customers
Participants	700 customers
Publication	Yes—results held locally
Non-DSS involvement	None
1995	
Doncaster	
Title	Qualitative survey of customer representatives
Duration	6 months
Target population	19 local customer representative organisations
Participants	All 19 took part
Publication	Report produced and held locally
Non-DSS involvement	None

[1] No other pilots, trials or research studies have been identified.
[2] All the above research was conducted by the Benefits Agency.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 from organisations for people with diabetes; what replies have been sent; and if he will make a statement. [18474]

Mr. Burt: Representations have been received from a broad range of organisations representing disabled people, which may include people with diabetes. All representations received are given careful consideration.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18648]

Mr. Burt: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Children's Maintenance Payments

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to ensure that no court order for children's maintenance payments are stopped by the Child Support Agency until the parent responsible for child support payments has accepted the agency's *(a)* temporary and *(b)* other assessments and agreed to make payments from a specified date. [19920]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: No. The child support scheme aims to ensure that all parents maintain their children to the extent that they can afford to do so. Making action conditional on confirmation that the absent parent accepts the assessment would allow such parents to defer indefinitely any enforcement of maintenance by the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will instruct the Child Support Agency to collect information about the number of court orders for children's maintenance payments which they stop and the date, in each case, that payments begin under Child Support Act 1991 arrangements. [19919]

Mr. Mitchell: No. The Child Support Agency has no business need to record the number of such cases nor would it serve any reliable policy monitoring function.

Benefits

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many awards for benefit he has suspended under regulation 37A of the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 for each year since its introduction; [20084]

(2) how many awards of benefit he has suspended under regulation 37A of the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 in each year since 1990. [20086]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested as figures are not kept on an annual basis. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Provision	Estimated number of cases affected
Regulation 37A of the Social Security Claims and Payments Regulations 1987	52,100

Estimate relates to the number of cases affected since the regulation came into force on 9 March 1992.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many awards of benefit he has suspended pending appeals in the cases of *(a)* Graham and *(b)* Halliday, aka Fairey; in how many cases the suspension was lifted following representations by or on behalf of claimants; and if he will give a breakdown of the reasons for lifting the suspension. [20194]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Lead case	Number of suspensions	Number of suspensions lifted
Graham	46,418	1,693
Halliday	2,796	13

Note:
In all cases the suspension was lifted on the grounds of hardship.

Child Support Departures Scheme

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to carry out the planned pilot exercise referred to during the passage of the Child Support Bill to test arrangements for the new child support departures scheme. [20528]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I have today laid before parliament a statutory instrument containing the regulations which will underpin the trial of the child support departures scheme. The pilot exercise will begin on Tuesday 9 April and will involve cases covered by the Hastings Child Support Agency centre. Invitations to participate in this pilot scheme will be issued from today onwards.

HEALTH

Locum Budget

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the locum budget for *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses in each of the last five years. [17940]

Mr. Malone: There is no national budget for locum doctors or nurses.

Message Handling Services

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has undertaken of the benefits for emergency and immediate notifications of the use of a uniform electronic messaging system at all levels of the NHS. [18787]

Mr. Horam: A system for the electronic transmission of emergency communications between the Chief Medical Officer and the national health service is currently being piloted in Kent and Birmingham. The benefits to the NHS will be assessed once the pilot is complete.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the BT Syntegra system became generally available within the NHS in October 1995. [18791]

Mr. Horam: After extensive testing in several health authorities, involving a range of users in the national health service, Syntegra launched its message handling service for use in the NHS at the Exchanging Healthcare Information conference in October 1995. So far, 222 connections have been made and this number is expected to grow over time.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if trusts are obliged to have regard to the contract awarded by his Department by competitive procurement to BT Syntegra in 1994 when making decisions concerning message handling services. [18789]

Mr. Horam: The use of Syntegra's message handling service is not mandatory in the national health service. Each NHS organisation will decide on the basis of value for money whether or not to use the Syntegra message handling service. The large corporate discounts obtained from Syntegra mean that alternatives are unlikely to be cost effective.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his current estimate of the cost savings to the NHS accruing from use of Syntegra's message handling service. [18793]

Mr. Horam: It is too early to make realistic estimates of cost savings to the national health service due to the use of Syntegra's message handling service.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current number, in actual and percentage terms, of subscribers to the BT Syntegra NHS message handling system; and what was the number in October 1995 among *(a)* health authorities, *(b)* family health services authorities *(c)* hospital trusts, *(d)* other trusts and *(e)* general practitioners. [18792]

Mr. Horam: The number of subscribers to Syntegra's message handling system are as follows:

	October 1995	February 1996
Organisationally based systems—e.g. health authorities and trusts where there would be many individual users	44	86
Personal systems—e.g. a GP.	29	136

Numbers of users by national health service units, also expressed as a percentage of the total subscribers, are as follows:

	October 1995		February 1996	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Health authorities	2	3	2	1
Family health services authorities	4	5	29	13
Hospital trusts	20	27	32	14

	October 1995		February 1996	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Other trusts	2	3	4	2
General practitioners	0	0	20	9
Others—e.g. Department of Health, NHS Executive	45	62	135	61

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to trusts regarding the take-up and use of each of the message handling services available within the NHS. [18790]

Mr. Horam: General guidance about NHS-wide networking services, which includes message handling, has been issued to all NHS organisations, including NHS trusts. It is planned that this guidance will be supplemented by Syntegra's marketing activities, and other networking suppliers wishing to sell their services to the NHS.

Computers

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many separate local area networks and wide area networks are currently in operation within the NHS. [18796]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19457]

Mr. Horam: During 1995–96 the Department rented computer capacity from:

Hoskyns Group plc: £112,300

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys: £14,000

Apart from this the Department has, since 1987, purchased total services which have included computer processing capacity from other departments and the private sector. Services have been provided by Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, Department of Social Security, Information Technology Services Agency and Chessington Computer Centre—an agency of the Cabinet Office—in the public sector and by Data Sciences and CMS, taken over recently by Hoskyns Group plc, in the private sector. The cost of computer capacity cannot be separated within the total charges.

Pharmacists

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the 80 per cent.-20 per cent. payment schedule for pharmacists; and if he will make a statement. [19208]

Mr. Malone: We continue to discuss the pharmacists' concerns about the present payment arrangements.

Gender Identity Disorder

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of diagnosed cases of gender identity disorder in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and how many were (i) male-to-female and (ii) female-to-male. [19269]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department gives to practitioners and health authorities regarding the treatment of gender identity disorder. [19273]

Mr Bowis: Guidelines on specific medical treatments are a matter for the relevant professional body.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's forecast for the future growth of numbers of diagnoses of gender identity disorder created by the backlog of previously untreated cases. [19270]

Mr. Horam: It is for individual health authorities to assess the health care needs of their local populations, working closely with clinicians.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what definition of the gender identity disorder syndrome is used by the NHS and by his Department. [19272]

Mr. Bowis: There are a variety of internationally recognised gender disorders classified within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and ICD-10 Classification of Mental Disorders.

North Staffordshire and South Cheshire Health Authorities

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the five most common causes of death for women in the North Staffordshire and South Cheshire health authorities in the last year for which figures are available. [19556]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is shown in the table. Data are not at present available for the new South Cheshire health authority, which incorporates the former Chester district health authority, South and East Cheshire DHA, and small parts formerly within Wirral DHA and North Cheshire DHA. Chester DHA and South and East Cheshire DHA together constitute almost 95 per cent. of the new South Cheshire health authority.

Top five causes of death in 1994 to female residents of:

	ICD
North Staffordshire DHA	
1. Ischaemic heart disease	410-414
2. Cerebrovascular disease	430-438
3. Pneumonia	480-486
4. Breast cancer	174
5. Malignant neoplasm of the trachea, bronchus and lung	162
Chester DHA	
1. Ischaemic heart disease	410-414
2. Cerebrovascular disease	430-438
3. Pneumonia	480-486

Top five causes of death in 1994 to female residents of:

	ICD
4. Malignant neoplasm of the trachea, bronchus and lung	162
5. Breast cancer	174
South and East Cheshire DHA	
1. Ischaemic heart disease	410-414
2. Cerebrovascular disease	430-438
3. Pneumonia	480-486
4. Breast cancer	174
5. Malignant neoplasm of the trachea, bronchus and lung	162

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pregnancies occurred in each of the last five years in the North Staffordshire and South Cheshire health authorities. [19557]

Mr. Horam: The information requested for the North Staffordshire health authority is shown in the table. Data are not at present available for the new South Cheshire HA, which incorporates the former Cheshire DHA, South and East Cheshire DHA, and small parts formerly within Wirral DHA and North Cheshire DHA. Estimates are provided for the former Cheshire DHA and the former South and East Cheshire DHA which together constitute almost 95 per cent. of the new South Cheshire HA.

Conceptions[1], 1989–93

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993[2]*
North Staffordshire HA	6,295	7,599	7,118	6,882	6,542
Chester DHA	2,532	2,971	3,041	2,718	2,723
South and East Cheshire DHA	5,774	6,688	6,435	6,239	6,199
	8,306	9,659	9,476	8,957	8,922

[1]Includes pregnancies which resulted in either a maternity or a termination of pregnancy by abortion under the 1967 Act. There is no reliable information about pregnancies which led to spontaneous abortions and these are not included.

[2]Analyses of data about conceptions in 1994, most of which resulted in births during 1995, will be completed later this year.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS ambulance trusts are deemed to be rural services; which of these contain significantly sized urban areas; and, in each case, what is the latest percentage of emergency calls reached within *(a)* eight minutes, *(b)* 14 minutes and *(c)* 19 minutes, for (i) the trust as a whole, (ii) the urban areas and (iii) the rural areas. [19564]

Mr. Horam: Information on rural services and their response times can be found in "Statistical Bulletin on Patient Transport Services in England: 1994–95," copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Information on areas and response times within ambulance services is not available centrally, but may be available from local health authorities and ambulance services.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many vehicles were in service with each NHS ambulance trust in each of the last three years; and, of these, how many were *(a)* emergency vehicles and *(b)* vehicles for non-emergency purposes; [19560]

(2) how many vehicles and of what type are (i) owned and (ii) leased by each NHS ambulance trust; and, for each type, how many are *(a)* less than one year old, *(b)* between one and three years old, *(c)* between four and seven years old and *(d)* eight or more years old. [19511]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of criterion-based dispatch systems for the prioritisation of emergency calls. [19512]

Mr. Horam: We are still awaiting the final report of a research study commissioned from Sheffield university.

York District Hospital

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for cataract surgery was at York district hospital at the latest date for which figures are available and at the same date in each of the previous five years. [19610]

Mr. Horam: Waiting time returns are collected centrally on a specialty basis and not by individual procedure. The number waiting by time band for elective admission in ophthalmology at York Health Services National Health Service Trust, and for York district health authority prior to 1992, are contained in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Chiropody Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what entitlements apply in respect of free chiropody services for *(a)* men and *(b)* ladies over the age of 60 years. [19351]

Mr. Bowis: Whatever the age and sex of the patient, national health service services, including chiropody services, are available on the basis on clinical need.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conclusions his Department has reached in respect of the studies on the health effects of opencast mining referred to in his answer of 9 May 1995, *Official Report*, column *419*. [19447]

Mr. Horam: We are still in discussion with researchers about a proposal for research on this subject. We hope to reach a decision shortly.

Emergency Patients (Transport)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will hold centrally records of the number of emergency patients transported more than 50 miles to receive hospital treatment and of how many subsequently died; and if he will make a statement. [19348]

Mr. Horam: I have no such plans. Health authorities and hospital trusts are responsible for the health-care of national health service patients in each locality. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 6 March a programme of action on emergency care services.

Ward Closures

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what notification has been received by his Department in respect of ward closures at *(a)* Doncaster royal infirmary and *(b)* Mexborough Montagu trust. [19633]

Mr. Horam: None

Psychiatric Hospital Care

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is collated centrally in relation to the extra-contractual referral of patients needing acute psychiatric hospital care; and if he will make a statement. [19823]

Mr. Bowis: No such information is collected centrally.

Thyroid Cancer

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the Prime Minister's letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 8 January, what consideration he is giving to the evidence gained regarding stable iodine prophylaxis in the cause of World Health Organisation and European Union work in western European nuclear matters in relation to United Kingdom health service planning for radiological emergencies involving diseases such as thyroid cancer. [17910]

Mr. Horam: The United Kingdom Health Departments are fully aware of the evidence arising from the World Health Organisation and European Union work as was stated in the reply by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Balton, West Blaenau Gwent (Mr Smith) on 27 November 1995 at columns *523-24*. This work is being taken into account in a revision of guidance to the national health service on planning for radiological emergencies, which is currently under way.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the current average waiting time for men claiming refunds as a result of the recent European Court ruling on prescription charges for men aged 60 to 65 years before *(a)* decisions are made about eligibility and *(b)* the refunds are provided; [19197]

(2) what measures have been taken to shorten the waiting time for men claiming refunds as a result of the recent European Court ruling on prescription charges for men aged 60 to 65 years. [19198]

Mr. Malone: A total of 187,000 claim forms have been issued by the prescription claims processing unit. Once completed claim forms have been received, the average time taken to assess entitlement and issue authorisation of payment is one month.

Administrative procedures have been kept as simple as possible and we expect 90 per cent. of payments to have been authorised by the end of March.

Child Labour

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prosecutions have occurred for the illegal employment of children in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [19336]

Mr. Bowis: I understand that the number of defendants prosecuted under the relevant provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and the Education Act 1944 in the last three years for which statistics are available was as shown in the table.

England and Wales

Offence Description/Legislation	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Causing or allowing person under 18 to go abroad to perform for profit [Children and Young Persons Act 1933 sections 25 and 26]	1	—	2
Offences against the [Education Act 1944 sections 58 to 60] including offences against byelaws as to employment of children (except offences relating to mines, factories or workshops)	—	2	8
Offences in connection with employment of children and young persons [Children and Young Persons Act 1933 sections 18 to 21 (section 18 as amended by the Children Act 1972)]	12	5	3
Causing or allowing children to take part in entertainments without licence [Children and Young Persons Act 1963 section 40(1)(a)]			
Total	13	7	13

Source:
Home Office.

In addition, I understand that the number of informations laid under the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act 1920, which prohibits the employment of school age children in industrial undertakings was as set out in the following table:

England and Wales

Date of hearing[1]	*Informations laid*
1992–93	1
1993–94	8
1994–95	2

Notes:
[1] Years commencing 1 April.
[2] Provisional.
Source:
Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on child labour. [19298]

Mr. Bowis: We have a comprehensive legal system in place to protect the health, welfare and education of children who work.

Public Consultation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public consultation procedure a health

authority is required to undertake before using private facilities to provide care services previously available in hospital. [19366]

Mr. Malone: Health authorities are statutorily required to consult the relevant community health council on proposals which would result in substantial changes to local services.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he has to monitor the delivery of undertakings given by health authorities during public consultation procedures on the closure or change of use of health facilities. [19367]

(2) what mechanisms are available to the public to ensure the implementation of policy commitments given by a health authority during a public consultation process. [19368]

Mr. Malone: Progress on the development of new health facilities, or changes to them, is monitored by the NHS Executive. The public can raise any matters of concern direct with a health authority or through their community health council.

Contact Lenses

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend the leaflet, "Contact Lenses and You", published by his Department, to make reference to acanthamoeba; and if he will make a statement. [19502]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to amend the leaflet, "Contact Lenses and You", since it already makes reference to the necessary aspects of lens care and hygiene relevant to acanthamoeba.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has taken to ensure that the leaflet "Contact Lenses and You" is available at opticians. [19503]

Mr. Malone: My Department has ensured widespread availability firstly by taking out a series of press notices in leading eye care professional journals setting out the necessary information for obtaining these leaflets; and secondly through direct promotion by the relevant eye care professional bodies.

Property Sale, Harrogate

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the procedures adopted by his Department for the sale of the former Yorkshire regional health authority building in Harrogate; and if he will make a statement. [19698]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on March 1996, *Official Report* columns *288–89*.

Myodil

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the numbers of United Kingdom citizens rendered disabled by Myodil. [19680]

Mr. Malone: None, as this information is not centrally available.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations his Department has received from, and what assistance it has given to *(a)* the Myodil Action Group and *(b)* the Arachnoiditis Trust since 1987; [19678]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into seeking a cure for arachnoiditis. [19679]

Mr. Horam: We have received a number of representations from arachnoiditis sufferers and organisations representing them since 1987. The Government have offered financial assistance to the Arachnoiditis Trust for three years through the general scheme of grants to voluntary organisations under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 to help fund a pain management nurse. Since making its grant application, the Arachnoiditis Trust has re-assessed its priorities and has declined to take up our offer of funding.

My Department has not directly commissioned research into a cure for arachnoiditis. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. The MRC is always willing to consider high quality research proposals.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in the headquarters division of the Department of Health in each year from 1991 to the current year. [19796]

Mr. Horam: Information for Department of Health headquarters only is not available prior to April 1995. Information for 1995 is shown in the table.

Scientific staff numbers (whole-time equivalents)

	April 1995
Senior scientific officer	19
Higher scientific officer	13
Scientific officer	9
Assistant scientific officer	1
Total	42
Engineering staff (all grades)	Nil

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what immediate measures he will take to tighten the voluntary agreements on tobacco advertising. [20027]

Mr. Horam: The voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising was comprehensively renegotiated at the end of 1994 and strengthened substantially in a number of areas, particularly in relation to the protection of children.

Meningitis

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what money has been given for research into meningitis in each of the last five years. [19224]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 6 March 1996]:* The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC, which is currently doing research in this area, receives its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department of Health commissioned a two-year clinical trial of candidate meningococcal vaccines in 1993 at a cost of £198,528. The NHS is known to have spent £88,900 on two meningitis-related research projects since 1991.

WALES

Mr. Mark Griffen

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will enable Mark Griffen of Buckley to have essential treatment at the Breakspeare hospital, Hertfordshire. [17341]

Mr. Richards: Responsibility for arranging treatment for Mark Griffen remains a matter for the Clwyd health authority.

I understand that the health authority has recently issued a press statement to explain its action to date and the arrangements under way to secure the necessary treatment for Mark Griffen.

Nursing Homes

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the average daily number and *(b)* the number per 1,000 people aged 75 years and over, of (i) occupied geriatric beds, (ii) long-stay beds in NHS nursing homes and (iii) places occupied in (1) local authority residential homes, (2) voluntary residential homes, (3) private residential homes and (4) private nursing homes in Wales for the latest year for which information is available. [18912]

Mr. Richards: The information is given in the following table. There are no NHS nursing homes in Wales.

	Number	*Rate*[1]
Average daily occupied geriatric beds in NHS hospitals (1994–95)	2,704	12.7
Places occupied by residents of all ages in:		
Local authority residential homes for the elderly (at 31 March 1994)	4,957	23.2
Voluntary residential homes for the elderly (at 31 March 1994)	972	4.5
Private residential homes for the elderly (at 31 March 1994)	6,722	31.5
Private nursing homes (at March 1995)	10,969	51.3

[1] Per 1,000 population aged 75 years and over using the 1994 mid-year estimate.

Full-time Education

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of 16-year-olds stay on in full-time education. [18924]

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

16-year-olds in full-time education 1994–95[1]

	Number	*Percentage of mid year population*
Schools[2]	13,074	39
Further and Higher Education Institutions[3]	10,770	32
Total	23,844	72

[1]Numbers enrolled at January for schools, November for further education institutions and December for Higher education institutions. Age at 31 August prior to academic year. Provisional.
[2]All maintained and independent schools.
[3]Includes the University of Wales. Full-time, short full-time, short course and sandwich students.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the number of extra pupils that will be coming into full-time statutory education in each of the next three years and the number of teachers that will need to be employed on the basis of the pupil-teacher ratio of 1989–90. [19918]

Mr. Richards: The available information is as follows:

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Estimated Welsh population of an age to receive statutory full-time education[1]	433,100	435,000	435,900	435,900
Change on previous year	—	1,900	900	0

Source:
Government Actuary's Department 1994 based population projection.*Notes:*
[1]At January each year, aged 5–15 or 16 but not yet of school leaving age.

The 1989–90 pupil/teacher ratio for all pupils within Welsh schools, including the pupils who were younger than five or over the school leaving age, was 18.1. No assessment has been made centrally of the need for additional teachers.

School Pupils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of children in Wales are in *(a)* primary schools, including voluntary primary, *(b)* comprehensive and grant-maintained comprehensive schools, *(c)* nursery schools, *(d)* private schools and *(e)* selective state grammar schools. [18926]

Mr. Richards: The following table shows the percentages as at January 1995. All maintained secondary schools in Wales are comprehensive.

	Percentage[1] *of all pupils*
Primary schools:	
LEA and grant maintained (including voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools)	57.3

	Percentage[1] of all pupils
Secondary schools:	
LEA maintained comprehensives	37.4
Grant maintained	1.9
LEA maintained nursery schools	0.7
LEA maintained special schools	0.7
Independent schools	2.0
Total	100

[1]Percentages have been calculated by dividing the number of full-time and part-time pupils in each type of school by the total number of full-time and part-time pupils in each type of school by the total number of full-time and part-time pupils in all schools.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the nursery voucher system. [18916]

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 January 1996, *Official Report,* column *838,* and to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 26 January 1996, *Official Report,* columns *479–80.*

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the cost to local education authorities of administering the nursery voucher scheme; and if he will make it his policy to provide for these costs in the revenue settlement to local authorities in the event of the scheme being implemented in 1997. [19944]

Mr. Richards: The vouchers will be distributed and redeemed by a private contractor selected through normal tendering procedures to secure best value for money. The costs of the contractor will be funded from the new money that will be available. Additional administrative burdens for local authorities should be minimal. It is open to the Welsh Local Government Association to identify additional costs in the annual revenue settlement discussions with the Department.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which voucher schemes he examined before agreeing to introduce vouchers for pre-school provision for four-year-olds; and what conclusions he reached about their success in expanding provision and improving quality. [19942]

Mr. Richards: The Government consider that a voucher scheme is the most appropriate means of expanding nursery provision, while offering parents a greater choice in the sort of provision they want for their child, stimulating greater diversity of provision to enhance that choice, and raising standards generally. The scheme is being developed and tailored specifically to achieve those objectives. It is not meaningful to seek to make comparisons with other voucher schemes.

School Inspections

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools in Wales, by county, have been commended by the inspectorate; and if he will make a statement. [18919]

Mr. Richards: This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member and will place a copy of his reply in the Library of the House.

Council Tax

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each of the new unitary authorities and for Wales as a whole the *(a)* estimated council tax levels for each band per two-person household, *(b)* average council tax for each two-person household, *(c)* estimated revenue raised from council tax, *(d)* estimated revenue from all other sources and *(e)* column (c) expressed as a percentage of the totals of columns (c) and (d). [18528]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Unitary authorities in Wales are required to notify my right hon. Friend of the level of council tax set for 1996–97 by 18 March. I will write to the hon. Member when the final figures are available and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Local Management of Schools

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the mandatory exceptions that are taken into account when local education authorities are assessing that part of their education budget on which the minimum of 90 per cent. must be given to schools under the local management formula; and if all of the mandatory exceptions are covered by properly approved orders under which local authorities operate local management of schools properties. [19925]

Mr. Richards: Details are contained in the Education (Financial Delegation to Schools) (Mandatory Exceptions) Regulations 1995 which as a result of the Education (Financial Delegation to Schools) (Mandatory Exceptions) Revocation and Amendment) Regulations 1996 will apply to local education authorities in Wales for a financial year beginning on or after 1 April 1996.

University of Wales

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the numbers of students at each college of the university of Wales in each of the last five years, indicating the funding provided by the Government in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms for each college in each of these years. [19929]

Mr. Richards: The number of students at each college of the university of Wales from 1990–91 to 1994–95[1] was:

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*[2]
Aberystwyth	4,013	4,502	5,070	5,767	6,629
Bangor	3,819	4,291	5,015	5,509	6,163
Cardiff	10,069	11,065	12,134	13,110	15,155
St. Davids	1,012	1,150	1,332	1,472	1,592

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95[2]
Swansea	6,056	7,124	7,823	8,807	9,688
College of Medicine	1,201	1,355	1,738	1,725	2,295
Total	26,170	29,487	33,112	36,390	41,522

[1]Includes full-time and part-time students. At December.
[2]Provisional.

In cash terms, the colleges received the following grant support from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales in the academic years 1993–94 and 1994–95:

£ million

	1993–94	1994–95
Aberystwyth	15.7	21.9
Bangor	16.1	21.4
Cardiff	37.2	49.7
St. Davids	3.3	5.0
Medicine	10.5	12.7
Swansea	23.7	32.2

In addition, the colleges received grant from the funding council in respect of backlog maintenance and some other capital works in the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95. This was:

£ million

	1993–94	1994–95
Aberystwyth	0.5	0.6
Bangor	0.5	0.7
Cardiff	0.8	0.3
St. Davids	0.1	0.1
Medicine	—	—
Swansea	0.6	0.8

The movement in GDP between 1993–94 and 1994–95 was nearly 2 per cent.

Prior to 1993–94, funding for the higher education institutions in Wales was from a variety of sources. Comparable funding information for these years could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what percentage of the rate support grant has been included by the Welsh Office to give local education authorities the option to provide pre-school education for *(a)* four-year-olds and *(b)* three-year-olds in each of the last five years; [19924]

(2) what percentage of the revenue support grant has been included by the Welsh Office to support local authorities in meeting their statutory commitments to provide services for children under five years in each of the last five years. [19923]

Mr. Richards: Revenue support grant is not attributed to specific local authority services.

University of Glamorgan

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of students at the university of Glamorgan in each of the last five years, indicating the sums provided from public funds in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms in each of these years. [19928]

Mr. Richards: The number of students at the university of Glamorgan—formerly the polytechnic of Wales—from 1990–91 to 1994–95[1] was:

1990–91: 6,791

1991–92: 8,098

1992–93: 11,525

1993–94: 13,886

1994–95: 14,517[2]

[1]Includes full-time and part-time students. At November for 1990–91 to 1993–94 and at December for 1994–95.

[2]Provisional.

In cash terms, the university of Glamorgan received grant support from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales in the academic years 1993–94 and 1994–95 of £18.7 million and £28.9 million respectively. In the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95, it also received grant of £600,000 and £1.1 million respectively, in respect of backlog maintenance. The movement in GDP between 1993–94 and 1994–95 was nearly 2 per cent.

Information on funding in the three years prior to 1993–94 could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what plans he has for the funding of the university of Glamorgan in 1998–99; and how many students this funding will enable the university to accept; [19926]

(2) what plans he has for the funding of the colleges of the university of Wales in 1998–99; and how many students this funding will enable the colleges to accept. [19927]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend announced the financial provision for the higher education sector in Wales for 1996–97, and the planning figures for the following two years, on 13 December 1995, *Official Report*, column 1004. A copy of the Department's letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales setting out the details of the settlements has been placed in the Library of the House. Decisions relating to individual institutions are for the HEFCW.

Special Needs Teacher Training

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what steps he has taken in the last three years at *(a)* the initial teacher training level and *(b)* in the grants for education support and training programme to provide teachers with the skills to identify children who may be dyslexic; [19930]

(2) what steps he has taken in the process of preparation and implementation of the code of practice in the identification and assessment of special educational needs of providing training for teachers to identify children *(a)* learning with difficulties with particular reference to dyslexia and *(b)* behavioural problems with particular reference to the autistic spectrum. [19931]

Mr. Richards: From autumn 1996 all newly qualified primary teachers will have to acquire in their initial training the necessary foundation to develop the ability to identify and provide for special educational needs, including specific learning difficulties or dyslexia. A similar requirement has been in place for newly qualified secondary teachers since autumn 1994.

The Welsh Office for a number of years has made specific grant available to local education authorities under the grants for education support and training programme to develop staff expertise and provision for pupils with special educational needs. This includes grant expressly for training in the teaching of pupils with dyslexia or autism, for teachers with designated responsibilities for special educational needs in ordinary schools and for measures to support schools in the application of the code of practice. The grant is continuing in 1996–97.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 12 March 1996

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Ghana

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding Ghana's recent human rights record. [19843]

Mr. Hanley: We welcome the improvements that have taken place in the human rights situation in Ghana in recent years. There is respect for the constitution, the rule of law applies, there is press freedom and a high level of personal liberty. Political activity is permitted and further multi-party elections are due in December 1996.

Burundi

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the meeting between the Minister for Overseas Development and the Foreign Minister of Burundi on 22 February. [19842]

Mr. Hanley: Mr. Bakevyumusaya briefed my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker on the success of his Government's recent "Pacification Campaign". She assured the Minister of our continued support for international efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation in Burundi and the neighbouring region.

Equatorial Guinea

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the elections in Equatorial Guinea; and what assessment he has made of the withdrawal of opposition candidates from the presidential elections. [19841]

Mr. Hanley: We regret that the presidential elections which took place in Equatorial Guinea on 25 February were not conducted in a free and fair manner. We urge the Government and all political parties to work towards the establishment of democracy.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20096]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Lord Chancellor's departments sponsor the following advisory non-departmental public bodies:

Insolvency Rules Committee

County Court Rule Committee

Supreme Court Rule Committee

Land Registration Rule Committee

Family Proceedings Rule Committee

Crown Court Rule Committee

Advisory Council on Public Records

Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct

Council on Tribunals

Law Commission

Legal Aid Advisory Committee (NI)

Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax (NI)

Advisory Committees on JPs in Northern Ireland

Advisory Committees on Juvenile Court Lay Panel (NI)

Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax

Advisory Committees on JPs in England (excluding the Duchy of Lancaster) and Wales

Judicial Studies Board

Honorary Investment Advisory Committee

All but the last seven have a statutory base.

(a) None is under a statutory requirement to publish its advice to Government;

(b) The Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct, the Law Commission and the Council of Tribunals are all required by statute to make annual reports to the Lord Chancellor. While there is no statutory requirement on the Advisory Council on Public Records to submit an annual report, there is a requirement that any report by it to the Lord Chancellor should be included in the Public Record Office's own annual report, for which there is a statutory requirement; and

(c) all of the annual reports in *(b)* are laid before Parliament by the Lord Chancellor, under a statutory requirement.

The Legal Aid Advisory Committee (NI) is required to consider the Law Society's annual report on legal aid in Northern Ireland and the Lord Chancellor is required to lay before Parliament a copy of any comments or recommendations made by the committee.

The other bodies do not publish advice or produce annual reports.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20113]

Mr. Evans: For the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department, the answers are as follows:

(a) none

(b) The following advisory bodies have carried out public consultation exercises:

the Supreme Court Rule Committee

the County Court Rule Committee

the Family Proceedings Rule Committee

the Law Commission

the Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct the Judicial Studies Board.

(c) the Supreme Court Rule Committee, the County Court Rule Committee and the Family Proceedings Rule Committee regularly consult with individuals and organisations which have a professional or commercial interest in the amendment of rules of court.

The Law Commission does conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests but this is encompassed within (b) above.

(d) none

(e) none

(f) none

There is no statutory requirement for these bodies in these areas.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20470]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, a recent survey within the Department has shown that 93.8 per cent. of all invoices are paid within agreed terms, or within 30 days of receipt of invoice, where no such terms exist.

SCOTLAND

Railway Investment

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what grants under *(a)* section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 and *(b)* other legislation have been awarded by the Scottish Office for railway infrastructure in Scotland between 1975 and 1995 in (i) the Strathclyde passenger transport executive area and *(b)* the rest of Scotland. [19301]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table:

	Number of projects	*Grant awarded (outturn prices) £ million*
Section 56 grants		
Within the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive (SPTE) area	5	103.3
Outwith SPTE area	2	11.0
Other legislation		
Freight facilities grants within SPTE area	14	3.1
Freight facilities grants outwith SPTE area	18	4.7
Grants for repairs to listed buildings outwith SPTE area	1	0.2

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was spent on *(a)* fixed rail infrastructure in Scotland, *(b)* investment in new railways, upgrading and re-opening of railways, new and improved stations and new signalling and *(c)* maintenance of track, signalling, structures and stations in Scotland at outturn prices in each year from 1975 to 1995. [19305]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not available. British Rail keeps only limited historic information on investment on a geographical basis.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what procedures govern applications for railway rolling stock to be used in the highlands objective 1 area where the stock is owned by a leasing company and leased to a train operating company. [19310]

Mr. Kynoch: All applications for European regional development fund support must be submitted by a public agency and a minimum level of matching funding must be included within the funding package. Any grant support paid is channelled through the sponsoring public agency.

In addition, all applications must be eligible under the terms of the single programme document and must also contribute to the outputs anticipated for the programme. applications for mobile infrastructure —that is that which could be readily moved outwith the programme area— would not normally be eligible.

Squirrels

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made as to whether extending the use of warfarin to control grey squirrels is in breach of the Grey Squirrels and Warfarin Order 1973; and if he will make a statement. [19983]

Mr. Kynoch: Extending the use of warfarin to control grey squirrels was approved under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 and is not in breach of the Grey Squirrels (Warfarin) Order 1973.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies into the expansion of grey squirrel distribution have been conducted by his Department. [19161]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 6 March 1996]:* The Forestry Commission has undertaken a survey of grey squirrel distribution every year since 1958. The Institute of Terrestrial Ecology's biological records centre also maintains records of the location of grey squirrels.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the cost of grey squirrel damage to broadleaf trees in each year for the last five years. [19160]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 6 March 1996]:* Damage by grey squirrels can kill broadleaf trees, reduce their growth rate, degrade their timber and allow diseases into them. It is difficult to estimate the total cost of this damage as the loss in value of the timber can be calculated only after the trees have been felled, and any assessment of the impact on growth rate and mortality can be only approximate. Recent estimates have suggested that the annual cost of the damage is between £3 million and £20 million.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he had *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effects of secondary poisoning caused from the use of warfarin for squirrel control. [19162]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 6 March 1996]:* We have undertaken several research studies into the risk of secondary poisoning of non-target species by warfarin, and the Forestry Commission commissioned a review of these studies which was carried out by the Central Science Laboratory.

Forestry Commission (Legal Advisers)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *267*, if he will name the firm of solicitors which has been appointed to the Forestry Commission with effect from 1 April. [20389]

Mr. Kynoch: Tods Murray, WS.

Flooding

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effects of flooding in the Grampian area in September 1995; and if he will make a statement. [20641]

Mr. Kynoch: The Government have decided to trigger the Bellwin scheme for Grampian in respect of the flooding experienced in that area in September 1995. We have already held discussions with local authorities in the area, but will now be writing to all local authorities concerned, inviting them to submit formal claims in respect of expenditure which they believe to be eligible under the terms of the scheme.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the expenditure incurred by Renfrew district council as a result of flooding in December 1994; and if he will make a statement. [20640]

Mr. Kynoch: I am glad to announce that we have decided that Renfrew district council is eligible for a payment of £167,558 under the Bellwin scheme. The scheme was triggered following the flooding for severe weather sustained in Strathclyde in December 1994.

The district council's claim for assistance has been subject to detailed scrutiny. The payment relates mainly to expenditure incurred in connection with the temporary evacuation of people from their flooded homes and the provision of temporary accommodation, and the hire of plant, including drying and heating equipment, to make homes habitable again.

Forest Enterprise

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the results of the environmental appraisal conducted under the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" published by the Department of the Environment on the framework document for the new Forest Enterprise agency. [19549]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The framework document for Forest Enterprise will set out its aims, responsibilities and status. It is therefore not an appropriate subject for environmental appraisal under the guidance contained in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment".

DEFENCE

Air Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the location and circumstances of the accident to *(a)* a Royal Navy Lynx on 23 February 1994, *(b)* a Sea Harrier on 16 April 1994, *(c)* a Royal Navy Sea King on 25 March 1994, *(d)* a Royal Navy Sea Harrier on 16 April 1994, *(e)* an RAF VC10 on 5 May 1994, *(f)* an RAF Tornado on 20 May 1994, *(g)* an RAF Nimrod on 30 July 1994, *(h)* a Royal Navy Lynx on 5 September 1994, *(i)* a Royal Navy Sea King on 12 October 1994 and *(j)* an Army Air Corps Gazelle on 11 November 1994. [19627]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows:

(a) We have no record of an accident involving a Royal Navy Lynx on 23 February 1994.

(b) A Royal Navy Sea Harrier was lost to warring party action on an operational mission over Bosnia-Herzegovina on 16 April 1994. The crew of one ejected safely.

(c) A Royal Navy Sea King was conducting a medical evacuation from a ship off Lizard point, Cornwall, on 25 March 1994. The stern of the ship yawed rapidly, making contact with the winch wire which was transferring a diver to the vessel. The wire became entangled and snapped, causing the diver to fall approximately 15 ft to the ship's deck, sustaining minor injuries.

(d) An RAF steward fell from an open door of an RAF VC10 parked at Dulles airport, Washington on 5 May 1994, sustaining injuries to his elbow, hip and shoulder.

(e) An RAF Tornado ejector seat fired accidentally during servicing at Boscombe down on 20 May 1994, injuring the arm and leg of an RAF tradesman.

(f) The wingtip of an RAF Nimrod struck a parked vehicle at RAF Fairford on 30 July 1994 whilst taxi-ing, causing injury to the civilian occupant of the vehicle.

(g) A Royal Navy Lynx was undergoing maintenance at RNAS Portland on 5 September 1994. While descending from an aircraft servicing platform, a maintenance rating slipped and fell approximately 5 ft, injuring a foot.

(h) A Royal Marine landed heavily, injuring a leg, during a rapid roping serial from a RN Sea King at RAF Marham on 12 October 1994.

(i) An Army Air Corps Gazelle belonging to the School of Army Aviation was being used to conduct hover exercises at Middle Wallop airfield on 11 November 1994. During the flight, a student was given limited control of the hovering

aircraft. He made a control error and the instructor was unable to stabilise the helicopter before it made contact with the ground; the occupants sustained minor injuries.

Royal Squadron

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current number and aircraft type flown by 32 Squadron, the Royal Squadron; and if he will list by rank the number of personnel currently attached to the squadron. [19816]

Mr. Soames: Number 32 (the Royal) Squadron is comprised of the following aircraft:

Aircraft type	*Number*
BAe 146 100 Series	3
BAe 125 700 Series	6
BAe 125 600 Series	[1]1
Wessex HCC Mk 4	2
Gazelle HT MK3	[2]2

[1] +1 in use reserve.
[2] +2 in use reserve.

The Gazelle helicopters will shortly be replaced by two contractor owned-military operated Twin Squirrel AS 355 F1 helicopters.

The following personnel are assigned to the squadron:

Rank	*Number*
Wing Commander	1
Squadron Leader	18
Lieutenant Commander (RN)	2
Flight Lieutenant	29
Master Air Crew	2
Sergeant	10
Corporal	18
Senior Aircraftsman	18

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the members of the royal family who are entitled to use flights on *(a)* official and *(b)* private travel in aircraft of 32 squadron, the Royal Squadron. [19774]

Mr. Soames: Members of the royal family are entitled to make flights in aircraft of No. 32 (the Royal) Squadron as follows

(a) Official travel

The Queen
The Duke of Edinburgh
The Queen Mother
The Prince of Wales
The Princess of Wales
The Duke of York
The Prince Edvard
The Princess Royal
The Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon
Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester
The Duke of Gloucester
The Duke of Kent
The Duchess of Kent
Prince Michael of Kent
Princess Michael of Kent
Princess Alexandra, the Hon. Lady Ogilvy

(b) Private travel

The Queen
The Duke of Edinburgh
The Queen Mother
The Prince of Wales
The Princess of Wales

Members of the royal family are entitled to use aircraft of the No. 32 (the Royal) Squadron at the discretion of Her Majesty the Queen.

In accordance with the wishes of Her Majesty the Queen, arrangements agreed by my right hon. and learned Friend, the then Secretary of State for Defence, were introduced on 1 April 1995 under which the costs of private flights in aircraft of No. 32 (the Royal) Squadron by members of the royal family would be reimbursed to the MOD.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in order of precedence those members of the royal family who may request a flight by 32 Squadron, the Royal Squadron, to be charged to the privy purse; and if he will make a statement. [19635]

Mr. Soames: My Department meets the costs of all official travel in aircraft of No. 32 (the Royal) Squadron by entitled members of the royal family. Since the introduction of arrangements on 1 April 1995, costs for the private use of No. 32 (the Royal) Squadron by the five entitled members of the royal family are met from their private funds. The sources of private funds used to pay for such private travel is a matter for the royal households.

Services Clothing Manufacture

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the clothing requirements of the armed forces is manufactured in the United Kingdom. [19626]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DCTA, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Roycroft to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 12 March 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the percentage of the clothing requirements of the armed forces that are manufactured in the UK, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency.

In Financial Year 1994/95 the MOD placed over 90%, by value, of its Clothing & Textiles orders with British suppliers. The figure for Financial Year 1995/96 is likely to be similar. Therefore, under 10% of MOD Clothing &. Textiles purchases have been from overseas suppliers. However, an increasing number of UK companies are subcontracting or sourcing from overseas because of the advantages in setting up and labour costs.

When tendering, companies are required to provide details of any manufacturing source outside the tenderer's premises i.e. the nature of any subcontract work, including the name and address of the contractor who will carry it out. The minimum percentage of UK manufacture is 10% of the order quantity which must be manufactured at the prime contractor's ISO 9000 series certificated site. Apart from this requirement there is no obligation for contractors to provide further detail of the percentage of work to be

performed overseas, indeed with contractors subject to various factors e.g. exchange rates, extended lines of supply and possible offshore labour problems, percentages of manufacture in UK/offshore can often change during the duration of the contract/enabling arrangement.

You will appreciate therefore that I cannot provide you with an accurate percentage of overseas manufacture. I hope that the foregoing is helpful but, if you have any further questions do not hesitate to contact me.

Regimental Establishment Levels

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Army regiments are currently at their full establishment level; and what is the percentage shortfall in each of the other regiments. [19817]

Mr. Soames: The 9th/12th Lancers, The Corps of Royal Engineers, the Highlanders, the Kings Regiment, The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, The Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment and the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps are currently manned to their full establishment of soldiers. The percentage surplus or shortfall of soldiers against establishment on 1 February 1996 is shown for each regular army regiment and corps in the table. Officer manning is generally satisfactory with a small surplus.

Regiment/Corps	*Percentage shortfall/ surplus*
The Household Cavalry	–9.1
The Queen's Dragoon Guards	–5.0
The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards	—6.9
The Royal Dragoon Guards	–11.5
The Queen's Royal Hussars	–11.8
The 9th/12th Lancers	+4.3
The King's Royal Hussars	–10.5
The Light Dragoons	–1.8
The Queen's Royal Lancers	–2.8
1st Royal Tank Regiment	–9.0
2nd Royal Tank Regiment	–3.5
The Royal Regiment of Artillery	–7.7
Corps of Royal Engineers	+.2
The Royal Corps of Signals	–4.7
The Grenadier Guards	–2.3
The Coldstream Guards	–2.1
The Scots Guards	–9.5
The Irish Guards	–5.3
The Welsh Guards	–8.5
The Royal Scots	–10.7
The Royal Highland Fusiliers	–13.8
The King's Own Scottish Borderers	–7.0
The Black Watch	–12.3
The Highlanders	+2.3
The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders	–16.6
The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment	–13.6
The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers	–5.9
The Royal Anglian Regiment	–7.6
The King's Own Royal Border Regiment	–7.1
The King's Regiment	+4.5
The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire	–7.2
The Green Howards	–4.8
The Queen's Lancashire Regiment	–7.1
The Duke of Wellington's Regiment	+4.2
The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment	–1.6
The Cheshire Regiment	–7.8
The Royal Welch Fusiliers	–7.6
The Royal Regiment of Wales	–11.9
The Gloucester Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment	+3.0
The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment	—1.1
The Staffordshire Regiment	–7.2
The Light Infantry	–7.6
The Royal Green Jackets	–16.0
The Royal Irish Regiment	–10.2
The Parachute Regiment	–18.0
The Brigade of Gurkhas	–1.2
The Army Air Corps	–8.3
The Royal Logistic Corps	–2.6
The Royal Army Medical Corps	–1.3
Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	–1.7
The Adjutant General's Corps	–2.5
The Intelligence Corps	–5.6
Corps of Army Musicians	–.1
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps	+.5

Argentina (Arms Sales)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* arms and *(b)* arms-related contracts were approved by Her Majesty's Government with the Argentine Government between the years 1979 and 1982. [19811]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Ministry of Defence is not the licensing authority for exports and does not otherwise normally approve contracts between exporters and overseas customers. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has set out details of contracts for the supply of defence equipment to Argentina in the relevant period, *Official Report*, 6 March 1996, column *228*.

51 Squadron, Royal Air Force

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the role and function of 51 Squadron, Royal Air Force; what are its annual running costs; and from which subheads of which votes these funds are taken; [19960]

(2) how many aircraft are currently assigned to 51 Squadron, Royal Air Force; what plans there are to increase the number of aircraft assigned to this squadron; what are the estimated costs of such an increase; and from which subheads of which votes these funds will be taken; [19959]

(3) on what date 51 Squadron, Royal Air Force, was established. [19961]

(4) what is the current assignment of 51 Squadron, Royal Air Force. [19958]

Mr. Soames: No. 51 Squadron, Royal Air Force, was reformed on 21 August 1958 to operate electronic reconnaissance aircraft. The squadron currently comprises two Nimrod R aircraft; a Nimrod MR2 from storage is being converted to replace a third which was lost on 16 May 1995.

The squadron's forecast running costs for the current financial year are approximately £7.1 million, and are included in Air Officer Commander-in-Chief Strike Command's top level budget, vote 1 section D1.

There are no plans to increase the squadron's complement of three aircraft.

Overseas Training Deployments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what maximum authorised levels of *(a)* deployed RAF personnel and *(b)* deployed RAF combat aircraft are being requested of the Canadian authorities under the new multinational memorandum of understanding governing training activities at Canadian forces base, Goose bay, Labrador. [19745]

Mr. Soames: The new memorandum of understanding concerning allied military activity at Goose bay specifies that an annual maximum of 18,000 training sorties, of which no more than 15,000 may be at low level, can be flown by all the allied users. The MOU does not specify a maximum level of deployed RAF personnel or deployed RAF combat aircraft and does not require the RAF to request such levels.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for Royal Air Force training deployments to United States marine corps air station Yuma, Arizona. [19637]

Mr. Soames: No formal invitations have been received from the United States authorities for future RAF participation in exercises at Marine Corps air station, Yuma.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many investigations were carried out by the Royal Air Force police flying complaints flight in 1994; and how many breaches of low flying regulations were confirmed by these investigations. [19639]

Mr. Soames: The RAF police flying complaints flight carried out 632 investigations in 1994 which confirmed 70 breaches of low flying regulations.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the changes made to the minimum weather requirements for visual low flying since 1989. [19636]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the letter the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my noble Friend, the Viscount Cranborne, wrote to him on 29 November 1993, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House. There have been no changes to minimum weather requirements for visual low flying since that date.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the nationalities of military aircraft booked into *(a)* area 5E and *(b)* area 3A of the night low flying system between 1800 hours and 1930 hours GMT on 6 January 1995. [19746]

Mr. Soames: No military aircraft were booked into night low flying sectors 3A and 5E between the times stated on 6 January 1995.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints were received about low flying aircraft in the vicinity of Darlington on 12 July 1994. [19640]

Mr. Soames: None.

Warton Airfield

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flights originated from, or bound for, Warton airfield were recorded by the military air traffic control authorities between 1700 hours and 2000 hours GMT on 6 January 1995. [19748]

Mr. Soames: Military air traffic control records of this type are normally retained for a maximum of three months. Consequently, the information requested is no longer available.

Tornado Accident

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the board of inquiry into the accident to a Tornado GR 1A on 1 September 1994 obtained evidence on the routes flown by other aircraft booked to fly in low flying area 14 at the time of the accident. [19754]

Mr. Soames: Yes. This was considered fully by the board of inquiry which concluded that there was no evidence to suggest that another aircraft was involved in the accident.

Exercise Arid Thunder

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent, nature and purpose of Royal Air Force participation in Exercise Arid Thunder in December 1995. [19638]

Mr. Soames: Exercise Arid Thunder 1995–96 was divided into four two-week periods. RAF participation was as follows:

Unit	*Dates*
13 Squadron	3–17 November 1995
14 Squadron	20 November–1 December 1995
617 Squadron	3–15 December 1995
17 Squadron	19 February–1 March 1996

Eight Tornado aircraft and 122 personnel were deployed from each squadron. The purpose of the exercise was to provide training by expending life-expired BL755 munitions.

F-117 Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many F-117 aircraft were present in the United Kingdom on 6 January 1995. [19749]

Mr. Soames: None.

Munitions Dumps

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list *(a)* the exact location of munitions dumps in the English channel south of the Thames and the Severn estuaries, *(b)* the exact composition of the materials which were put into those dumps, *(c)* the ports which were used for that dumping, *(d)* the periods during which those ports were used for dumping, *(e)* the ships used for such dumping and *(f)* all monitoring of the dump sites for environment and safety which has taken place since 1966 or is currently taking place; [20182]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacies of the registration of munitions dump sites in the English channel. [20183]

Mr. Soames: Records of the total tonnages, ports and vessels involved in munitions disposal are not available. From surviving records it has been established that the following general areas, shown more extensively on hydrographic charts, were designated, although not necessarily used, as conventional explosive dumping grounds in the English channel before 1973:

Area	*Position*
Hurd Deep	49 30 00 N—3 34 00 W
St. Catherines Deep	50 34 00 N—1 12 00 W
NW of Alderney (2 sites)	49 50 00 N—2 18 00 W
NW of Alderney (2 sites)	49 47 00 N—2 17 00 W
SSW of Guernsey	49 18 00 N—2 42 00 W
Whitesand Bay, Plymouth	50 18 45 N—4 16 00 W

Current scientific advice indicates that dump sites present no significant risk to safety, human health or the marine environment if left undisturbed.

Fast Jet Training

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current average period for completion of fast jet training. [20226]

Mr. Soames: A qualified fast jet pilot needs to complete successfully three main stages of fast jet training before being deployed to an operational flying squadron. The average length of time it currently takes for a new pilot to progress through the flying training stages is 259 weeks which is longer than usual due to a backlog of pilots in training. From the end of 1996, however, the backlog should have been resolved and the current planned cycle for a new pilot starting training now, will be on average 109 weeks. This includes six weeks of breaks between courses and is dependent on pilot capability, weather and the operational conversion aircraft or course required.

The main stages, aircraft employed and the minimum flying hours/weeks are as follows:

Main stages	*Aircraft employed*	*Minimum flying hours/weeks*
Basic flying training	Tucano	120 hours/42 weeks
Advanced training and tactics	Hawk	103 hours/33 weeks
Operational conversion	Various fast jets	'88–129 hours/22 weeks

' Average.

Military Training Assistance (Ghana)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on military training assistance provided to Ghana in the last five years; how many British personnel were involved; and how many Ghanaian *(a)* military and *(b)* police officials have visited the United Kingdom for training since 1990. [19840]

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom has provided a number of small teams of United Kingdom military personnel to carry out training of Ghanaian military personnel in the last five years and a team of several British officers has also assisted at the Ghanaian staff college, one of whom remains. Since 1990, several Ghanaian officers have visited the UK for training. Precise details of military assistance are regarded as confidential between Governments. I understand that 10 Ghanaian police officials have visited the UK for training since 1990.

Bulford Camp Primary Schools

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rents or charges he makes to Wiltshire county council in respect of services or land occupied by *(a)* Haig county primary school and *(b)* Kiwi county primary school, in Bulford camp, Wiltshire; and if he will make a statement. [20244]

Mr. Soames: The following charges have been raised over the last 12 months:

	£
Haig county primary school	
Land for playground—rental charge	'130.00
Sewer connection charge	'20.00
Water connection charge	'20.00
Water	1,390.00
Electric	1,011.00
Kiwi county primary school	
Sewer connection charge	'20.00
Water connection charge	'20.00
Water	559.00
Electric	1,984.00

' Fixed annual charge.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make representations to Wiltshire county council opposing the proposed closure of Haig county primary school in Bulford camp, Wiltshire; and if he will make a statement. [20243]

Mr. Soames: Wiltshire county council has discussed the proposed closure of Haig county primary school with the local military authorities and has consulted with parents, governors and staff. The outcome of these consultations will be considered by the county council's education committee and any proposal to change the current provision will be published by way of public notices. Objections can be registered at this stage and these will be passed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for adjudication.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the service families with children at Haig county primary school in Bulford Camp, Wiltshire, have a parent currently serving in Bosnia; and if he will make a statement. [20247]

Mr. Soames: Twelve per cent. of service families with children at Haig primary school have a parent currently serving in Bosnia.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost to his Department of security attributable to *(a)* Haig county primary school and *(b)* Kiwi county primary school in Bulford camp, Wiltshire; and if he will make a statement. [20245]

Mr. Soames: There is no identifiable extra cost to my Department attributable to security arrangements for either school.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates he has made of *(a)* the married quarters population and *(b)* the numbers of nursery and school-age children dwelling in the married quarters and within designated catchments of (i) Haig county primary school, and (ii) Kiwi county primary school in Bulford camp, Wiltshire; and if he will make a statement. [20246]

Mr. Soames: The estimated population of the married quarters estates at Bulford camp is 2,564. Within the designated catchment area of Haig county primary school, there are an estimated 49 nursery and 94 school-aged children living in the married quarters. The corresponding figures for the Kiwi county primary school catchment area are estimated to be 118 nursery and 188 school-aged children.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the advisory non-departmental pubic bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20102]

Mr. Soames: The independent board of visitors was established in accordance with the Imprisonment and Detention (Army) Rules 1979 for military corrective training centres. This is the only one of the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department which has a statutory base. I regret that in my earlier answer to the hon. Member, *Official Report*, 27 April 1995, column *695*, I erroneously stated that the Dartmoor steering group and working party also had a statutory base.

There is no statutory requirement for any of MOD's advisory non-departmental public bodies to publish their advice to Government, publish an annual report or lay their annual reports before Parliament.

The annual reports of the Dartmoor steering group and working party and the review board for Government contracts are placed in the Library of the House on a voluntary basis.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20472]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Defence Bills Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from T. R. Thurgate to Mr. Clive Betts, dated 12 March 1996:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March 1996, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, if no date was specified, older than 28 days. As this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Defence Bills Agency I have been asked to reply.

As the Defence Bills Agency pays approximately 3 million bills each year, the information requested is only available at disproportionate cost. However, we do monitor our payment performance closely in terms of volume of bills. So far this financial year over 99.9% of bills have been paid within 30 days fo receipt at our office in Liverpool. We also measure our performance against the higher departmental standard of payment within 11 days, we have achieved an average of 97% so far this financial year.

ENVIRONMENT

Landfill Tax

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the timetable for finalising his Department's proposed waste classification system will be coincident with that for implementation of the landfill tax; and if he will make a statement. [19138]

Mr. Clappison: The landfill tax will be introduced on 1 October this year, as my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, confirmed in his Budget speech last autumn. Those wastes subject to the lower rate of tax have been the subject of extensive consultation by HM Customs and Excise and will be set out in a Treasury order. A draft of the proposed contents of the order will be circulated in April. The third stage of the consultation on the national waste classification scheme will be published next month by my Department in conjunction with the Welsh Office, the Scottish Office and the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. This will involve the introduction of the scheme on a non-statutory basis from April, so that its use can be fully assessed.

Water Companies (Pay)

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were employed by, and how many served on the boards of, *(a)* Anglian Water, *(b)* North West Water, *(c)* Northumbrian Water Ltd., *(d)* Severn Trent, *(e)* Southern Water Services, *(f)* South West, *(g)* Thames Water, *(h)* Welsh Water, *(i)* Wessex Water and *(j)* Yorkshire Water; and what was the total remuneration paid to those on the board of each company, in the final year before each was privatised. [19430]

Mr. Clappison: This information is given in the prospectus for the water share offers published in November 1989. A copy of the prospectus is available in the Library.

Purchase Grant Scheme

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to consult on his proposals to exempt small rural settlements from the purchase grant scheme; and if he will make a statement. [19763]

Mr. Curry: We have today issued a consultation paper asking for comments from local authorities, housing associations, rural groups and other interested parties on how we propose to exempt small rural settlements in England from the new purchase grant scheme.

As we announced in the rural White Paper, neither the voluntary purchase grant scheme for associations' existing properties, nor the planned statutory scheme for future publicly-funded developments will apply to rural villages with a population of 3,000 or fewer inhabitants. This is because we recognise the particular difficulty there can be in such areas in building or finding replacement properties for rent.

The Housing Bill currently before Parliament would give the Secretary of State the power to designate by order rural areas where the new right would not arise.

The consultation paper sets out the way we propose to implement this designation in England. It invites comments on our general approach, and on the rural detailed proposals for 15 broadly representative counties and areas. We will also consult on the remaining areas of England, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will consult on proposals for Wales in due course.

Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Vote Office, and in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies of supplementary papers providing further details of proposed designations for each individual county or area, including copies of any maps needed, have also been placed in both Libraries.

Building Regulations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the adequacy of part B of the Building Regulations to take account of *(a)* modern building methods and construction techniques and *(b)* requirements of current fire safety needs; and if he will make a statement. [19747]

Mr. Clappison: My Department keeps the Building Regulations and associated technical guidance under review with issues such as these very much in mind.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend part B of the Building Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [19751]

Mr. Clappison: At its meeting on 22 February, the Building Regulations Advisory Committee considered a revised draft of the technical guidance approved in support of part B of the Building Regulations. I expect to be able to put these proposals out for public consultation later this year.

National Spring Clean

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to support the national spring clean from 12 to 21 April. [19952]

Mr. Clappison: National spring clean is funded from the Department of the Environment's grant to the Tidy Britain Group. The Tidy Britain Group has received a total grant of £2,897,000 in 1995–96.

The Department also intends to support publicity events and other activities connected with the national spring clean campaign.

Deceased Council Tax Payers

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received about notices issued by local authorities following the death of a council tax payer; [20069]

(2) if he will issue guidance to local authorities in respect of the appropriate tone to be employed in notices issued following the death of a council tax payer. [20068]

Sir Paul Beresford: I am aware of only one such representation.

The form of each notice is for individual local authorities to determine. However, we have issued guidance to authorities suggesting that notices issued in these circumstances should be accompanied by a sympathetic letter to the bereaved.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, column *102*, what sanctions are available to the Environment Agency in cases where a company has failed to implement solutions to pollution problems within the time scale agreed with the agency or with a predecessor authority. [20350]

Mr. Clappison: Section 13 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, through the Environment Act of 1995, provides for the Environment Agency to serve a company with an enforcement notice if it has failed to comply with the conditions of an authorisation issued under the 1990 Act. Section 23 also makes it an offence to operate a process without complying with all the conditions of such an authorisation.

Cement Kilns

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, column *101*, at what intervals chief inspector's guidance notes are reviewed; and when the chief inspector will next issue guidance notes on meeting the requirements of the hazardous waste incineration directive. [20349]

Mr. Clappison: Chief inspector's guidance notes on processes subject to integrated pollution control are reviewed every four years, or sooner where developments in pollution abatement techniques or technology warrant it.

Revisions to chief inspector's guidance notes for the waste disposal and recycling sector are due to be published in May/June 1996; revised guidance dealing with incineration processes is expected in June, and will give guidance on meeting the requirements of the hazardous waste incineration directive.

Thoresby Colliery (Accident)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Director General of the Health and Safety Commission about the fatal accident that took place at Thoresby colliery, Nottinghamshire; and if he will make a statement. [18956]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. I refer to my written answer of 19 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *307–08*, about the fatal accident at Thoresby colliery on 12 October 1995. I hope to be in a position to write to the hon. Gentleman later this month following the conclusion of the Health and Safety Executive's investigation and the inquest into the miner's death.

Child Employees

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* injuries and *(b)* deaths occurred in the last year for which figures are available among employed children where the source of injury or death was a direct consequence of employment. [19369]

Sir Paul Beresford: For 1994–95, the provisional figures for fatal and other injuries to employees under 16 years reported to the Health and Safety Executive's field operations division and local authorities are:

Severity of injury	*Number of injuries*[1]
Fatal	1
Non-fatal[2]	39
Total	40

[1] Includes trainees/pupils on work experience.

[2] Includes major and over three-day injuries as defined by the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985.

Education Authority Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, columns *153–54*, on the total amounts of grants provided to local authorities responsible for education if he will provide the figures separately for each local authority. [20278]

Mr. Curry: I have arranged for the figures for all local authorities to be placed in the Library.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20100]

Sir Paul Beresford: Details of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department are listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1995". A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 27 April 1995, *Official Report*, column *616*. The information contained in that answer remains correct.

None of the advisory bodies has a statutory requirement to publish an annual report or lay it before Parliament. The following advisory NDPBs publish annual reports on a voluntary basis: the Advisory Committee on Hazardous Substances, the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, the Local Government Commission for England and the Property Advisory Group, the report for 1995 being its first.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20478]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held centrally by my Department and is available only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arms Exports

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to end subsidies to the arms export trade; and if he will make a statement. [17915]

Mr. Oppenheim: It has been long-standing Government policy for the Export Credits Guarantee Department to support defence exports on no more favourable terms than apply to civil sales. The ECGD operates to a financial break-even objective on its new business, applying the same prudent underwriting criteria, cover policy and premium rates to civil and defence business.

Although there is the possibility of a subsidy arising from fixed rate export finance supported by the ECGD, the United Kingdom has been at the forefront of international negotiations to progressively eliminate the potential for such subsidy. The minimum interest rates supported under FREF are determined by international agreements, and fixed by reference to market levels.

While defence-related exports are not covered by these agreements, the ECGD applies the same rules in financing support for defence sales as for civil sales.

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all cases since 1987 in which his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19467]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department does not purchase raw computer capacity as such. Instead, a range of computer-related services is procured from a variety of sources. Following decentralisation of related budget responsibilities to individual management units, central records do not cover all uses of such services. In addition, the costs of those services reflect not only the computer capacity required but the specialist manpower and communication facilities needed to deliver them.

The majority of these services are currently delivered to my Department by Hoskyns plc following its success in a market test in 1994. The total value of services delivered during the first year of the contract was £6.7 million. Prior to the market test these services were delivered from in-house capacity. In addition, my Department has used the Treasury's Chessington Computer Centre for staff pay and pensions since 1980 at a current annual cost of £354,000.

Inward Investment

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) where inward investment seminars and conferences were held by his Department in 1995; and what was the range of numbers participating; [19939]

(2) how many inward investment seminars or conferences were held by his Department in 1995 and at what cost; and what cost was incurred in renting the venues. [19946]

Mr. Oppenheim: For the financial year 1995–96, my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau has been involved with the following seminars and conferences for inward investors:

Where held	*Overall costs*	*Cost of venue* £	*Number of participants*
Copenhagen, Denmark	Seminar sponsored by Den Danske Bank	Nil	15
Munich	£25,000	864.80	130
Stuttgart	Sponsored by BW Bank	Nil	50
Seminar with IHK Frankfurt	Arranged by Chamber of Commerce	Nil	20
Osaka, Japan	[1]£80,075	[1]4,678	153
Aomori, Japan	[1]£1,952	[1]1,861	35
Akita, Japan	[1]£1,623	[1]1,664	36
Morioka, Japan	[1]£2,415	[1]2,254	46
Yamagata, Japan	[1]£1,709	[1]1,407	24
Taipei Computer Association, Taiwan	[2]£140	Nil	6

[1] £1 = 140 Yen.
[2] £1 = 40 NT$.

Bankruptcy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, columns *135–36*, if he will give powers to shareholders of public companies to enable them to receive a detailed explanation of the reasons for a creditor company's refusal to initiate an action for bankruptcy in instances where the debt is in excess of £50,000 and where the debtor is an hon. Member. [19936]

Mr. Oppenheim: In general, shareholders of companies delegate to their board to management decisions such as the enforcement of debts owed to the company. A power for shareholders to intervene in these specific circumstances would not be appropriate.

Government Contracts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what procedures are in place to verify the credentials of private companies who tender for Government contracts. [20189]

Mr. John M. Taylor: A copy of the chapters from my Department's procurement manual providing guidance on the procedures for verifying the credentials of private companies which tender for DTI contracts has been placed in the Library of the House.

Reform Assistance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the criteria used for establishing areas eligible for regional assistance in the United Kingdom are identical with those used in other EU countries; and if he will make a statement. [20009]

Mr. Oppenheim: The criteria for eligibility for grants under the regional objectives of the EC structural fund are, in general terms, identical. They are contained in Council regulation (EEC) 2052/99 as amended by 2081/93 (OJ L193 of 31 July 1993). The criteria for designating areas eligible for support under the regional

selective assistance scheme are based on travel-to-work areas and are not therefore identical to those used in other EU countries.

Compliance Unit

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what cases are currently being pursued by his Department's single market compliance unit. [20221]

Mr. Oppenheim: The single market compliance unit is currently pursuing about 70 cases. The details of these are commercially confidential.

Manufactured Exports (Germany)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to investigate the extent of German non-tariff barriers against the import of manufactured goods from the United Kingdom. [20220]

Mr. Oppenheim: My Department has issued studies on the operation of the single market in public procurement, the chemicals sector and in respect of standards, testing and certification. The Department also analyses the complaints to its single market compliance unit. The unit received 13 complaints in 1995 alleging specific unjustified German non-tariff barriers to trade in manufactured goods. The Department has taken all of these up with the European Commission, the German Government, or both.

Fuel Suppliers

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received *(a)* during 1995 and *(b)* since 1 January alleging that certain fuel suppliers are (i) practising selective price support in favour of company-owned sites and (ii) discriminating against independent dealers through allegedly uncompetitive contracts; what representations have urged him to refer this matter to the Director General of Fair Trading; and if he will make a statement. [20214]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department has received a number of representations on behalf of independent retailers during 1995 and this year regarding the pricing policies of fuel suppliers. These have been brought to the attention of the Director General of Fair Trading, who has responsibility for investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour or abuse of monopoly power. The Office of Fair Trading investigated these complaints, which included some concerned with Esso's pilot pricewatch campaign, and concluded that action under competition legislation was not appropriate. However, the Office of Fair Trading will continue to monitor the market.

Plutonium Exports

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will specify the origin of the reactor, the isotopic composition, point of departure, mode of transport and final end use of the United Kingdom plutonium exported to the United States of America between 1967 and 1988 in the form of fuel elements. [20268]

Mr. Page: Plutonium exported from the United Kingdom to the United States of America under civil bilateral agreements was used for fuel elements as part of the US civil programme. All such exports were, where applicable, subject to the application of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. Plutonium exported for civil purposes was derived from UK reactors. Given the period over which these exports were made, information relating to the isotopic composition and mode of transport could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Cost Accounting

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the proposal of the Accounting Standards Board for abandonment of historical cost accounting. [20269]

Mr. Oppenheim: The draft of the proposed "Statement of Principles for Financial Reporting" published for public comment by the Accounting Standards Board does not propose an abandonment of historical cost accounting. Present practice already incorporates certain current values. The draft statement of principles makes clear the ASB's belief that, as markets develop, current values will become increasingly relevant and reliable. The ASB therefore encourages the development of practice in that direction but has stressed that it will not move faster on this subject than the business community will accept.

I welcome the publication of the draft statement as apart of the ASB's valuable work on improving the quality of financial reporting. I hope that the business community will consider what the statement has to say on the numerous important issues it addresses and will take the opportunity to contribute to the debate on them.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total number of workers in receipt of the national minimum wage in *(a)* the USA, *(b)* Japan, *(c)* Australia, *(d)* Canada, *(e)* New Zealand and *(f)* each EU state; and what percentage this represents of the total work force in employment in *(a)* to *(f)*. [20318]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government do not collect this information, and believe that it could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Employment Rights

Mr. Burden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the number of claims referred in each of the last three years to *(a)* the commission for the rights of trade union members and *(b)* the commission for protection against unlawful industrial action; and in each case how many were successful; [20337]

(2) what was the expenditure of *(a)* the commission for the rights of trade union members and *(b)* the commission for protection against unlawful industrial action in each of the last three years; [20342]

(3) if he will list *(a)* the numbers employed and *(b)* the expenditure on administration by (i) the commission for the rights of trade union members and (ii) the commission for protection against unlawful industrial action in the last three years; [20341]

(4) if he will list *(a)* the hours of work per week and *(b)* the remuneration of (i) the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members and (ii) the Commissioner for Protection against Unlawful Industrial Action. [20340]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There is no commission for the rights of trade union members nor commission for protection against unlawful industrial action. One person, Mrs. Gill Rowlands, currently, occupies both the office of Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members, CRTUM, and the Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action, CPAUIA. The CPAUIA was established in August 1993. The number of formal applications made to the CRTUM and the CPAUIA, and the numbers supported by the commissioners in each year are as follows.

	CRTUM		*CPAUIA*	
	Total applications supported	*Total applications supported*		
1993—94[1]	47	8	1	—
1994–95	57	12	—	—
1995–96[2]	85	9	3	—

[1] For the CPAUIA, August 1993 to 31 March 1994.
[2] 1 April 1995 to 8 March 1996.

The expenditure of each of the commissioners for each of the last three years has been as follows:

	CRTUM £	*CPAUIA* £
1993–94[1]	274,941	85,880
1994–95	293,716	104,543
1995–96[2]	287,888	86,218

Five staff have provided support for both Commissioners for the last three years.
[1] For the CPAUIA, August 1993 to 31 March 1994.
[2] 1 April 1995 to 8 March 1996.

Expenditure on administration (comprising staff salaries, accommodation and fuel and utilities) has been:

	CRTUM £	*CPAUIA* £
1993–94[1]	100,910	24,342
1994–95	100,555	50,277
1995–96[2]	109,885	50,709

[1] For the CPAUIA, August 1993 to 31 March 1994.
[2] 1 April 1995 to 8 March 1996.

The CRTUM is contracted to work two days per week, 7.5 hours each day and, for 1995–96, her remuneration, comprising salary, social security and pensions costs, will amount to £36,194. The CPAUIA is contracted to work one day, 7.5 hours per week and, for 1995–96, her remuneration will amount to £18,079.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20474]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) on 24 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *417*. Information on the basis requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Green Claims

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment he has made of the National Consumer Council report on green claims; [19982]

(2) what plans he has to implement the National Consumer Council's recommendations on green claims and to amend the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. [19981]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The report referred to was jointly commissioned from the National Consumer Council by my Department and the Department of the Environment. The Government will be responding to the report as soon as possible following its publication.

AEA Technology plc

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the chairmanship and composition of the boards of AEA Technology plc and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. [20718]

Mr. Lang: AEA Technology plc will be vested with the property, rights and liabilities of the commercial activities of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority on 31 March. On that date, Sir Anthony Cleaver will relinquish his appointment as chairman of the authority and become chairman of AEA Technology plc. Admiral Sir Kenneth Eaton will succeed Sir Anthony as chairman of the authority. Sir Kenneth's leadership qualities and his extensive experience of nuclear planning and procurement will be of particular value in this role.

In addition to Sir Anthony, the board of AEA Technology plc will comprise the following:

Executive directors

Dr. Peter Watson (Chief Executive)

Mr. Ray Proctor

Mr. Mike Watson

Non-executive directors

Dr. Brian Eyre (Deputy Chairman)

Professor Mike Brady

Mr. Gordon Campbell

Mr. Colin Sharman

Mrs. Steve Shirley

The non-executive directors currently serve as members of UKAEA and will relinquish their appointment at vesting.

From 31 March, the members of the authority will be:

Chairman:

Admiral Sir Kenneth Eaton

Executive members:

Dr. Derek Pooley (Chief Executive)

Mr. John Baxter

Mr. James Bretherton

Dr. Roy Nelson

Mr. Paul White

Non-executive members:

Mr. Chris Appleton

Dr. Rex Gaisford

Mr. Trevor Harrison

Mr. Neil Hirst

Mr. Clive Pickford

All currently serve as members of the management board of UKAEA Government division.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the implications of the late filing of annual accounts of Capita Managed Services Ltd. for the suitability of that company as the sole bidder for the Companies House central inquiry unit and postal search section in Cardiff. [19783]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* According to Companies House records, the most recent accounts, for the period to 31 December 1994, were filed by the deadline. Accounts for 1995 do not have to be filed until 31 October 1996.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19910]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* Those activities within my Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding are as follows:

(a) Facilities management consortia:

(i) None

(ii) None

(b) Private Finance Initiative:

(i) None

(ii) None

(c) Management Buyout Consortia:

(i) None

(ii) None

(d) Contractorisation schemes:

(i) Companies House (Cardiff) Central Enquiry Unit and Postal Search Services

(ii) None

(e) Market Testing schemes:

(i) None

(ii) None

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment he has made of the implications of the resignation of the chairman of Capita Managed Services Ltd. on the suitability of Capita Managed Services as the sole bidder of the central inquiry unit and postal search sections of Companies House; [19781]

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications of the resignation of John Jasper as chairman of Capita Managed Services Ltd. for that company's status as the sole bidder for the central inquiry unit and postal search sections at Companies House, Cardiff; and if he will make a statement. [19784]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answers 8 March 1996]:* I have not yet taken a decision about whether to award a contract for the running of the central enquiry unit and postal search accounts service at Companies House, Cardiff. Mr. Jasper has no current involvement in the running of Capita Managed Services Ltd.

Electrical Goods

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has received an interim report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the activities of suppliers of electrical goods; and if he will make a statement. [20083]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* I have not received an interim report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The MMC has until 31 October 1996 to report.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to report on the retail pricing of certain types of electrical goods; and if he will make a statement. [20007]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced on 14 February that he has given the Monopolies and Mergers Commission until 31 October 1996 to report on the monopolies references on the supply of eight categories of electrical goods.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in the headquarters division of his Department in each year from 1991 to the current year. [19797]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

	1 January 1991	*1 January 1992*	*1 January 1993*	*1 January 1994*	*1 January 1995*	*1 January 1996*
Science group						
Assistant Scientific Officer	1	1	0	0	0	0
Scientific Officer	11	6	8	7	7	8
Higher Scientific Officer	16	14	22	23	23	22
Higher Scientific Officer (Development)	1	2	7	10	10	9
Senior Scientific Officer	38	28	34	33	33	33
Professional and technical group						
Professional and Technology Officer	1	3	3	3	3	1
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	13	12	13	18	13	13
Senior Professional and Technology Officer	30	32	35	38	37	32
Totals	111	98	122	132	126	118

The figures exclude executive agencies and regional offices, and those specialist grades which are unique to this Department.

Birds Eye Wall's

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what factors will be taken into account in assessing the public interest in arriving at the decision over proceedings against Birds Eye Wall's under section 93B of the Fair Trading Act 1973 for knowingly or recklessly providing misleading information to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in its recent inquiry into ice cream exclusivity; [19582]

(2) when he expects to make a decision on proceedings against Birds Eye Wall's under section 93B of the Fair Trading Act for knowingly or recklessly providing misleading information to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in its recent inquiry into ice cream exclusivity. [19581]

(3) what account will be taken of the integrity of the processes of competitive regulation in the decision on proceedings against Birds Eye Wall's under section 93B of the Fair Trading Act 1973 for knowingly or recklessly providing misleading information to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in its recent inquiry into ice cream exclusivity. [19583]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* It is not the practice of the Department to comment publicly on individual cases under consideration. Any decisions which need to be taken will be announced in due course.

Computer Disc Theft

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what responsibility he had for the decision not to prosecute the person against whom sufficient evidence had been accumulated to provide a realistic prospect of conviction for alleged theft of a DTI computer disk and blackmail. [20052]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* No DTI computer disk has been stolen in the incident referred to by the hon. Member. The President had no responsibility for the decision not to prosecute for the misuse of information held by the Treasury Solicitor.

Insolvency Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to public funds of the proposed contracting out of insolvency casework as broken down into *(a)* the pre-feasibility study, *(b)* the feasibility study, *(c)* the 1995 advertisements, *(d)* the handling of the 149 expressions of interest, *(e)* the requirements scoping document, *(f)* the sifting of the 91 initial proposals, *(g)* the negotiations with 34 companies, *(h)* the invitation to tender, *(i)* the identification of three tenders offering value for money and *(j)* the stringent technical and financial evaluation; and what was the total cost of this exercise. [19584]

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The cost of the pre-feasibility and feasibility studies into the scope for private sector involvement in the work of official receivers was £65,251 and £61,500 — excluding VAT—respectively.

The costs of the contracting out exercise undertaken by the Insolvency Service, in the period beginning October 1994 when the Government announced their intention to pursue the preferred option identified by the then consultants to the announcement on 28 February 1996 of the outcome was £2,288,594. This figure could be broken down into the areas specified only at disproportionate cost.

As a result of the drive for greater efficiency implemented during the period of the contracting-out exercise, the service will achieve a reduction this financial year of 3 per cent. in the unit costs of bankruptcy and company liquidations.

I expect to announce shortly the targets which I have set for the Insolvency Service in 1996–97, which will look to the service to delivery substantial further savings above that level.

Structural Funds

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if there will be a revision of the areas eligible for grant from the EU structural funds under objective 2. [9379]

Mr. Eggar: *[pursuant to his reply, 11 January 1996, Official Report, co. 293]:*

On 8 March, the Commission announced that member states' total populations eligible for objective 2 grant will remain unchanged.

This is welcome news for the United Kingdom, preserving our national share of the total population in objective 2 areas, which is the largest of all member states. It follows strong representations made by the Government to the Commission and reflects the consensus at the meeting of EC Ministers in Madrid on 1 December in favour of complete continuity between the current list and the new list of areas.

The Commission is, however, inviting member states, if they wish, to make in the near future proposals for marginal additions to the list, to be balanced by proposed deletions of areas of equal population. I have considered carefully the question of proposing marginal changes to the list of UK objective 2 areas.

The programmes for current eligible areas have been running for less than 18 months. This is insufficient time to address the long-term structural problems which led to their designation under objective 2. I have had some representations in favour of additions to the list, and some in favour of no change, but only one proposing deletions, in a different part of the country from the proposer. I therefore do not intend to put forward any proposals for changes in the UK list. The list of eligible British areas will therefore remain unchanged.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19429]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Roxborough and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 16 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *728*.

These figures as a percentage are:

1992–93: 0.19 per cent.

1993–94: 0.13 per cent.

1994–95: 0.19 per cent.

1995–96: 0.62 per cent.

There is no record of any letters from hon. Members being transferred to executive agencies.

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19459]

Mr. Hanley: There have been no contracts of this nature since 1987.

Sudan

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise at the forthcoming meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, the subject of violations of human rights in Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [20223]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We deplore the continual and widespread violations of human rights in the Sudan. Together with our EU partners, we will seek to ensure continued monitoring of the situation by the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the evidence of violations of human rights in Sudan presented by Baroness Cox and John Eibner of Christian Solidarity International; and if he will make a statement. [20222]

Mr. Hanley: We read the reports of Baroness Cox and John Eibner with interest and concern. They contain many disturbing first-hand accounts of human rights abuses. We expect the Government of Sudan to investigate them fully and take appropriate action when allegations are well founded. Investigating human rights abuses in Sudan is not easy, but it is important to establish the facts. We look to the Government of Sudan to allow human rights monitors, including the UN Special Rapporteur, free access to all areas of Sudan.

British Council

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the British Council now has to withdraw facilities and services previously available to its staff. [21227]

Mr. Hanley: The provision of facilities and services to its staff is principally a matter for the British Council, but I am not aware of any proposed changes.

War Crimes Tribunal

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards widening the remit of The Hague war crimes court to include actions in Kosova; and if he will make a statement. [20277]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia's mandate covers the whole territory of the former Yugoslavia.

China (Missile Testing)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) on what occasions the testing of missiles by China near Taiwan's main ports has been raised in the European Union; and if he will make a statement; [20119]

(2) if Her Majesty's Government will protest at the Government of China's decision to have missile tests close to Taiwan on 11 to 15 March; and if he will make a statement. [20118]

Mr. Hanley: The European Union partners issued the following statement in Rome on 8 March:

"The EU deeply regret the firing by the People's Republic of China of missiles, beginning in the morning of March 8th, into test zones in the Taiwan Straits. The planned week-long exercise could lead to further tension in the region and increase the possibility of any miscalculation eventually leading to confrontation.

The EU, recalling the pledge always made by the PRC to stick to its fundamental policy on the Taiwan issue, which is to seek a peaceful solution, call on the PRC to refrain from actions which could have negative effects on the security of the entire region and urge early resumption of the cross-Strait talks".

We continue to monitor this difficult situation very closely.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20099]

Mr. Hanley: I have nothing to add to the answer that the then Minister for State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury, (Mr. Goodlad) gave to the hon. Member on 27 April 1995, *Official Report*, columns *707–08*.

Mr. Imshah Syed

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which Mr. Imshah Syed was refused leave to board a plane for Pakistan on 6 February to attend the Human Rights International General Assembly in London. [20120]

Mr. Hanley: We assume that the question relates to Mr. Syed Imdad Shah. We understand that Mr. Shah was refused leave to board a flight from Islamabad on 6 March on the instructions of the Pakistani authorities.

Human Rights

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on the United Nations draft declaration on human rights defenders and its inclusion on the agenda of the 52nd session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. [20369]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have participated actively in the working group preparing this declaration and regret that it has not been possible to reach agreement yet on a text. The UN Commission at its forthcoming session will consider a recommendation that the working group chairman should prepare a consolidated and refined text for further consideration by the group.

EU Member States (Territories)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *260*, if he will list for each EU member state those territories for whose external relations it is responsible; and in each case if the territory is *(a)* a member of the EU and *(b)* elects representatives to the European Parliament. [20396]

Mr. David Davis: The information requested is as follows:

Territory	*Part of EU?*	*Vote in EP elections?*
Denmark		
Faroe Islands	No	No
Greenland	No (since 1982)	No
France		
(The French Overseas Departments are an integral part of France and so are part of the EU and take part in elections to the European Parliament)		
French Polynesia	No	No
New Caledonia	No	No
Wallis and Futuna	No	No
St. Pierre and Miquelon	No	No
Mayotte	No	No
Netherlands		
The Netherlands Antilles	No	No
Aruba	No	No
Portugal		
(The Azores and Madeira are autonomous regions of metropolitan Portugal and so are part of the EU and take part in elections to the European Parliament)		
Spain		
(The Canary Islands, Ceuta and Melilla are integral parts of metropolitan Spain and so are part of the EU and take part in elections to the European Parliament)		
UK		
Anguilla	No	No
Bermuda	No	No
British Antarctic Territory	No	No
British Indian Ocean Territory	No	No
British Virgin Islands	No	No
Cayman Islands	No	No
Falklands Islands	No	No
Gibraltar	Yes	No
Hong Kong	No	No
Montserrat	No	No
Pitcairn Henderson Ducie and Oeno Islands	No	No
St. Helena and Dependencies	No	No
S. Georgia and S. Sandwich Islands	No	No
Turks and Caicos	No	No
Sovereign Base Areas (Cyprus)	No	No
The Channel Islands and Isle of Man apply some parts of the EU treaties, but do not elect representatives to the EP		
Germany		
Buesingen	Yes	Yes
Heligoland	Yes	Yes
Italy		
Livigno	Yes	Yes
Campione d'Italia	Yes	Yes
Finland		
Aaland Islands	Yes	Yes
Austria, Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg and Sweden have no overseas territories for whose external relations they are responsible		

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20479]

Mr. Hanley: We are committed to the Confederation of British Industry prompt payment code, which requires all invoices to be paid within the agreed credit period, or within 30 days of receipt where no credit period has been agreed. Details of the past performance of the FCO was given in a reply to the hon. Member on 14 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *754*.

Figures for outstanding payments within the FCO on 5 March could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19911]

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* Capita Managed Services and Lusis Business Solutions are not currently involved in bidding to the FCO for any of these services.

EU Working Time Directive

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to implement the European Union's working time directive; and if he will make a statement. [20332]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

I have no intention of implementing any part of the working time directive in advance of the decision by the European Court of Justice on the UK's legal challenge to the directive.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Policies (Lichfield)

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the impact of Government policies on the people of the city of Lichfield. [18422]

The Prime Minister: Lichfield has benefited fully from the Government's policies, which have given this country a stronger recovery than any other large European country and the longest run of low inflation for almost 50 years. Unemployment in Lichfield has fallen by 40 per cent. since its peak.

Department of Employment

Mr. Burden: To ask the Prime Minister what functions of the former Department of Employment have been transferred to *(a)* the Department of Trade and Industry, *(b)* The Department for Education and Employment and *(c)* other Government Departments; and what plans he has for the further transfer of such functions. [20338]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the press notice released by No. 10 Downing street on 5 July 1995, a copy of which is held in the Library of the House. It was subsequently decided that the Department for Education and Employment would have responsibility for work permits.

I have at present no plans for the further transfer of functions.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 March. [18979]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 12 March. [18980]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Children (Exploitation)

Mr. Alison: To ask the Prime Minister what invitations he has received from the Swedish Government for United Kingdom governmental participation in the world congress against commercial exploitation of children, to be held in Stockholm in August; what response has been made to the invitation; and which individuals will represent the United Kingdom. [20399]

The Prime Minister: We intend to take part in this congress in response to an invitation I have received from the Swedish Prime Minister. The British embassy is in close touch with the organisers in Stockholm, but a final decision has still to be made on the composition of the United Kingdom delegation.

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Prime Minister what changes he has made to the composition of the United Kingdom delegation to the parliamentary assembly of the OSCE. [20659]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) has resigned as a substitute delegate to the assembly and will be replaced by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks). This change takes effect from today.

Conservative Party Functions

Mr. Hall: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions upon which Government-owned premises were used for Conservative party functions in 1995, including details of the purposes for which each event was held, the name of each event's host and the date, time and place of each event. [17614]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* This information is not held centrally.

EU Legislation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister how many EU regulations have been passed; how many of these have altered United Kingdom law; and how many have been the subject of the fiche d'impact in each of the last five years. [18649]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The table provides a breakdown of the number of European Community regulations introduced since 1991.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Council[1]	335	383	319	274	242
Commission[2]	1,107	1,125	1,055	963	748

Source:

[1] Annual general reports of the activities of the European Communities from 1991–95.

[2] Commission's CELEX database of Community legislation. The figures exclude short-term or temporary regulations—eg. those measures relating to day-to-day management of agricultural matters. for 1995, the figures include regulations adopted up to 12 December 1995; full year figures are not yet available.

All European Community regulations are directly applicable in United Kingdom law. Information on how many proposals have been the subject of a fiche d' impact is not held centrally. However, it is the Government's policy to press for all proposals for Community legislation which may have a significant impact on business to be accompanied by a fiche d'impact.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of remand prisoners *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Greater Manchester area who have been held in custody for a period in excess of three months. [18255]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Jim Callaghan, dated 12 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question asking for the current number of remand prisoners (a) nationally and (b) in the Greater Manchester area who have been held in custody for a period in excess of three months.

The latest information is for 30 June 1995. On that date, 4,230 remand prisoners in England and Wales had first been remanded to custody more than three months previously. This figure includes both those who are awaiting trial and those who have been convicted and are awaiting sentence. The period since first remand into custody includes any intervening time spent on bail into prison. 265 of these remand prisoners were held in either Manchester prison or Hindley remand centre.

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19036]

Mr. Howard: The cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen or are otherwise unaccounted for in each of the past five years are:

	Value £
1991–92	
Equipment/Furniture	
4 items below £5,000	7,615
Information Technology (IT) Equipment	
3 items below £5,000	3,270
1992–93	
Equipment/Furniture	
6 Items below £5,000	3,482
IT Equipment	
1 item below £5,000	1,000
Items stolen costing £5,000 or more	
23 heat lamps	7,050
Horsebox and tools	6,500
Total	13,550
1993–94	
Equipment/Furniture	
7 items below £5,000	7,283
IT Equipment	
3 items below £5,000	5,127
Items stolen costing £5,000 or more	
3 computer systems and equipment	5,000
Computer system	5,000
Total	10,000
1994–95	
Equipment/Furniture	
6 items below £5,000	5,272
IT Equipment	
13 items below £5,000	15,517
1995–96	
Equipment/Furniture	
6 items below £5,000	6,435
IT Equipment	
6 items below £5,000	11,000
Items stolen costing £5,000 or more	
4 Computer systems	6,000
Computer components	55,000
Total	61,000

Speed Cameras

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Gatsometer speed cameras are in use on trunk roads in England and Wales. [19619]

Mr. Maclean: The information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions for speeding have resulted from the introduction of Gatsometer speed cameras; and how many have resulted in convictions. [19620]

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of prosecutions for speeding offences detected by automatic cameras is published in the annual Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Motoring Offences, England and Wales 1994", issue 23/95, Table B, copies of which can be found in the Library.

The information available to me suggests that some 94 per cent. of these prosecutions completed during 1994 led to a conviction.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reliability of evidence gained by Gatsometer speed cameras. [19621]

Mr. Maclean: All radar speed meters, such as the Gatsometer, have to be type approved by the Secretary of State under the provisions of section 20 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988, as amended, before they can be used for traffic law enforcement. To obtain type approval, such equipment must first be evaluated by the police service and it is then subjected to independent laboratory testing in which it has to meet published standards, including ones for accuracy and reliability, which have been set by the police scientific development branch. Police procedures also provide for other checks to be made on the reliability and accuracy of the equipment when it is in use.

Chinese Community

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations made in the 1985 report of the Home Affairs Committee on the Chinese community in Britain. [19644]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Football-related Offences

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British citizens were arrested in Munich before Nottingham Forest's match with Bayern Munich in the UEFA cup; and how many of them had previously been convicted in England for football-related offences. [19876]

Mr. Maclean: Of the 56 English fans arrested, three are known to have been previously convicted in England and Wales for football-related offences.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has made to the German Government to seek to reach a bilateral agreement with that Government so that domestic courts can impose restriction orders on those convicted of football-related offences in Germany. [19875]

Mr. Maclean: Approaches were made to the German Government shortly after the Football Spectators Act 1989 was implemented. However, there has been no progress so far in reaching an agreement, largely because of the federal structure of Germany.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he is making to the German authorities to ensure that all those arrested for alleged offences in Munich before Nottingham Forest's match with Bayern Munich in the UEFA cup are prosecuted in Germany. [19874]

Mr. Maclean: The prosecution of those who commit offences in another country is entirely a matter for that country.

Prisoners' Brains

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who is responsible for decisions to remove deceased prisoners' brains; [19955]

(2) who was responsible for the decision to remove Ronald Kray's brain. [19954]

Mr. Sackville: If organs or tissue are required to be removed for further examination to establish the cause of death, the decision is taken by the pathologist under the direction of the coroner.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each of the locations in which Ronald Kray's brain was stored before being returned to the body. [19963]

Mr. Sackville: Arrangements for the care of the material are a matter for the pathologists involved.

Electoral Registration

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been prosecuted and fined for refusing to enter their names on the electoral register in each of the last five years. [19690]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to use improved technology to provide for a closing date for absent vote applications nearer the date of elections; what proposals he has to abolish dies non in future calculations of election timetables; and if he will make a statement. [19803]

Mr. Sackville: The Government have been considering the question of changing the closing date for the receipt of absent voting applications and hope to make an announcement soon. There are no plans to abolish dies non.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to use improved technology to provide for a qualifying date for electoral registration nearer the publication of the electoral register; and if he will make a statement. [19804]

Mr. Sackville: The great majority of electoral registration officers already make extensive use of technology, but still require all the time between the qualifying date and the publication of the register to meet the current statutory provisions. There are no plans to change either date.

Crime (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the level of recorded crime in Bournemouth in each quarter since 1992. [19815]

Mr. Maclean: Information on recorded crime below police force level is not collected centrally.

Body Parts

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all those who have made contact with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Prison Service in order to solicit body parts for (i) organ donation and (ii) medical research; and what was the response to each request. [19964]

Mr. Sackville: It is a matter for the relatives and the person in lawful possession of the body to authorise the removal of body parts for these purposes and we are not aware of any such applications made to the Department or to the Prison Service. The donation of organs and the removal of body parts for medical research are governed by the Human Tissue Act 1961.

Visas

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those countries whose nationals are able to enter the United Kingdom without a visa. [20070]

Mr. Kirkhope: A list of those countries or territories whose nationals require visas to enter the United Kingdom is set out in the appendix to the Immigration Rules, as amended, a copy of which is in the Library.

Betting

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers are available to enforce the original contract where a gambler places a series of ante-post bets which are subsequently successful and the bookmaker fails to pay out on the accumulator and sets maximum winnings at a significantly lower level. [19372]

Mr. Kirkhipe: In law, all wagering contracts are unenforceable. However, under the Licensed Betting Offices Regulations 1986, bookmakers are required to display a notice setting out the terms on which they invite persons to bet on those premises including any maximum limit on the amount of winnings and the procedure for the resolutions of disputed bets.

Forensic Science Laboratory, Chepstow

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes his Department plans which will affect the forensic science laboratory in Chepstow; and if he will make a statement. [19933]

Mr. Maclean: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Chief Executive of the Forensic Science Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Janet Thompson to Mr. Alun Michael, dated 12 March 1996:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question about the future of the Forensic Science Service (FSS) laboratory at Chepstow. As you know, the arrangement now is that the Chief Executive of an Executive Agency, with the agreement of the Ministers, replies to Members of Parliament on operational matters. I am therefore replying on behalf of the FSS.

The FSS announced on 29 February that, as part of a national restructuring programme, it was looking at proposals to close three laboratories. These are first the laboratory at Aldermaston and subsequently, depending on the success of the earlier restructuring, those at Huntingdon and Chepstow. The proposals are subject to staff consultation. They were announced at this early stage to allow staff to be fully involved in their development. They are also subject to consultation with the police, both nationally and with individual Chief Constables, in particular on the development of a new national network of local forensic offices to bring forensic science closer to the investigator.

It may be helpful if I briefly explain the background to the proposals. As you may be aware, on 1 April 1996, the FSS is to merge with the Metropolitan Police Forensic Science Laboratory to form a new integrated national Forensic Science Service providing an improved and streamlined resource throughout England and Wales.

Joint research conducted by the FSS with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), together with regular FSS Customer Satisfaction surveys, have identified that substantial improvements could be achieved by the creation of a new national service, organised in national business areas. This would combine centralisation of scientific analysis to reduce cost and improve asset utilisation, with the development of a number of local forensic outlets to bring the service closer to its customers. We propose therefore, to concentrate scientific analytical resources at four key sites in London, Birmingham, Chorley and Wetherby. In addition to these four sites, there will be a network of new small forensic offices and satellite laboratories across the country. This will enable the FSS to provide a wide range of scientific support that will be geographically much more closely linked to the operational centres of the various county constabularies and metropolitan forces. The FSS is working with the Association of Chief Police Officers in developing the restructuring proposals to ensure that the changes support their forensic requirements.

As I explained earlier, the proposed closures are provisional at this stage. Moreover for all three laboratories, there is a guarantee that jobs will be available for all existing scientific caseworking staff. There will be some reductions in support staff at each site, but these will be small. The proposed restructuring will involve no diminution of service. Indeed the aim is to provide a better one. The increasing success of forensic science in the detection of crime and the conviction of offenders means that as a resource it must be made as easily available to the greatest number of police in the most cost effective way possible.

Child Abuse Cases

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the treatment of victims and witnesses in child abuse cases. [20024]

Mr. Maclean: The Government have introduced a range of measures in recent years to make it easier for children in these cases to give their evidence. The Criminal Justice Act 1988 made provision for children, with the leave of the court, to give their evidence by live television link so that they need never appear in court. The Criminal Justice Act 1991 prohibited the defendant from cross-examining the child and provided for a video-recorded interview to serve as the child's evidence-in-chief at the trial, again with the leave of the court.

These changes have helped to reduce stress for children who have to give evidence, but we are determined to implement further improvements. The Criminal Procedure

and Investigations Bill provides for binding rulings to be made so that children will have greater certainty about whether a video-recorded interview will be admitted as evidence-in-chief and whether they can give their evidence by live television link. We are pursuing a range of other measures, including further consideration of ways to reduce delays, improved arrangements for preparing the child for what to expect and promoting best practice in dealing with child witnesses, which will secure practical benefits for children.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is undertaken by those responsible for the video taping of victims' evidence in child abuse cases; and if he will make a statement. [20025]

Mr. Maclean: The Government issued a memorandum of good practice following the introduction of the measures in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 which allow a video-recorded interview with the child to serve as their evidence-in-chief. The memorandum was drawn up with the assistance of professionals and organisations with the experience of working with abused children and provides practical guidance to police officers and social workers who conduct video-taped interviews.

In addition to the memorandum, training for interviewing was provided by courses under the auspices of the Metropolitan police training centre and supplemented by an Open university training pack. Police officers and social workers now receive joint training known as the CAMAT—child abuse management and training course. Advice on interviewing child witnesses and victims is also included in the national investigative interviewing course which is available to all police officers and is now incorporated in mainstream police training.

We have commissioned further research to identify and promote best local practices for training child abuse investigators.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of convictions for *(a)* violent crime, *(b)* car crime and *(c)* serious crime in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [20049]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Number of offenders convicted, at all courts, for certain crimes 1984–94

England and Wales

Offence description	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Violent crime[1]	58,496	58,564	53,201	58,925	65,450	70,890	69,215	63,599	61,596	57,335	58,408
Car crime[2]	37,651	37,821	35,048	35,214	32,735	29,836	30,252	30,472	24,914	22,091	21,612
Serious crime[3]	449,449	443,936	384,209	386,419	386,236	339,547	342,759	337,608	324,910	307,584	314,148

[1] Includes the indictable offence groups of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery and the summary offences of common assault.
[2] Includes the indictable offences of theft from a vehicle, theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle, aggravated vehicle taking and the summary offences of stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance and aggravated vehicle taking.
[3] Taken as *all* indicatable, including triable either way, offences (including those in (1) and (2) above).

Stalking

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* the effectiveness of current legislation and injunctions to combat stalking and *(b)* his plans for legislation to combat stalking. [20026]

Mr. Maclean: The existing criminal law can be used to deal with a number of aspects of stalking behaviour. It is an offence to use threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour under the Public Order Act 1986; to make an indecent, obscene or menacing telephone call under the Telecommunications Act 1984; and to send an indecent, offensive and threatening letter under the Malicious Communications Act 1988. As a recent successful prosecution has shown, more serious acts by stalkers, such as causing grievous bodily harm, are caught by the criminal law.

Under civil law, a plaintiff may claim an injunction where he or she can demonstrate an actionable tort and once this is established the courts have a wide discretion to grant injunctions to meet the circumstances of a case.

Notwithstanding these powers, the Government are considering whether there is a need for wider measures specifically to combat the conduct of stalkers.

Director of Health Care for Prisoners

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to publish the fourth report of the Director of Health Care for Prisoners and the Health Advisory Committee's commentary on the report. [20823]

Miss Widdecombe: The report and commentary are published today. Copies are available from the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Drink Driving

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure incurred in the production and advertising of the "Never Ever Drink and Drive" campaign on *(a)* television, *(b)* radio and *(c)* printed media. [19868]

Mr. Moss: The information is as follows:

Television: £328,600[1]

Radio: Nil

Printed media: £17,400

[1] Includes contribution from private sector.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the production and advertising of the "Never Ever Drink and Drive" campaign went to *(a)* public tender and *(b)* quotation. [19870]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland Department of the Environment advertising agency briefed film production companies on 14 August 1995. Their quotations were submitted on 24 August 1995.

Public tendering rules do not apply to the purchase of advertising time and space. Production costs for the "Never Ever Drink and Drive" campaign were subject to quotation and extensive negotiation with all candidates during the months of September and October 1995.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what rules and regulations covered the tendering and awarding of the "Never Ever Drink and Drive" campaign; and how many tenders were requested. [19869]

Mr. Moss: The Northern Ireland Department of the Environment appointed the advertising agency, McCann-Erickson Belfast, by public tender, to carry out its road safety advertising campaigns. The "Never Ever Drink and Drive" campaign is part of that contract and the successful production company appointed to produce the television and cinema commercial was selected from bids from eight competing firms.

There are no published guidelines or regulations for advertising agencies when selecting production companies to produce a film.

Schools and Colleges (Expenditure)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the capital building programme for schools and colleges in Northern Ireland for the next five years. [19682]

Mr. Ancram: No. My Department's capital programme is published on an annual basis. The capital programme for 1996–97, totalling £48 million, was published on 5 February 1996.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the capital expenditure on schools and colleges in Northern Ireland in *(a)* real and *(b)* constant price terms in each of the past 10 years. [19681]

Mr. Ancram: Capital expenditure on schools and colleges by education and library boards and grants paid by the Department of Education on approved capital expenditure incurred by voluntary and grant-maintained integrated schools for each of the financial years 1984–85 to 1993–94 is set out in the table. Capital expenditure by boards is set out in the statements and the summary of the education and library boards' accounts, copies of which are available in the Library. The boards' figures for 1994–95 will be published in July 1996.

£ million

Year	*Real price terms*	*Constant price terms (1993–94)*
1984–85	15.763	25.311
1985–86	16.621	25.420
1986–87	26.108	38.754
1987–88	27.308	38.313
1988–89	35.485	46.662
1989–90	48.720	59.884
1990–91	63.916	72.731
1991–92	66.560	71.289
1992–93	76.603	78.838
1993–94	72.355	72.355

Education and Library Boards

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what estimate he has made of the maintenance backlog of each education and library board in Northern Ireland; [19683]

(2) what estimate he has made of the maintenance backlog of the education and library boards in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000; [19684]

(3) what action he has taken in response to the report by the Northern Ireland Audit Office "Education and Library Boards: Maintenance of Board Property". [19685]

Mr. Ancram: The current estimated maintenance backlog of each board is as follows:

Belfast: £33.6 million

North-eastern: £12.7 million

South-eastern: £30.3 million

Southern: £22.3 million

Western: £14.8 million

The extent of the maintenance backlog in any year is dependent on the previous level of investment by the boards and any additional demands which may arise. Estimates of the total maintenance needs for the three years ending 1999–2000 are not available.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office report has been considered in consultation with the education and library boards and a programme of action has been agreed to address the report's recommendations. This matter is the subject of on-going Public Accounts Committee consideration and my Department will be responding in detail to the PAC report in due course.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20094]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is in the table.

Advisory non-departmental public bodies	*Publish their advice to the Government*	*Publish an annual report before Parliament*	*Lay an annual report before Parliament*	*Statutory requirement*	*Voluntarily*
Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Boundary Commission	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Advisory Committee of the Therapeutic Professions Allied to Medicine	No	No	No	Yes	No
Central Dental Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Central Medical Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Central Nursing Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Central Personal Social Services Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Central Pharmaceutical Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Charities Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Clinical Engineering and Medical Physics Services Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Clinical Imaging Services Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board for Northern Ireland	No	No	No	Yes	No
Distinction and Meritorious Service Awards Committee for Northern Ireland	No	No	No	Yes	No
Laboratory Services Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Poisons Board	No	No	No	Yes	No
Drainage Council for Northern Ireland	No	No	No	Yes	No
Northern Ireland Water Council	No	No	No	Yes	No
Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland	No	No	No	Yes	No
Northern Ireland Building Regulation Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside	No	No	No	Yes	No
Historic Buildings Council	No	No	No	Yes	No
Historic Monuments Council	No	No	No	Yes	No
Industrial Development Board	No	No	No	Yes	No
Training and Employment Agency (Advisory Board)	No	No	No	Yes	No
Health and Safety Agency	No	No	No	Yes	No
Statistics Advisory Committee	No	No	No	Yes	No
Committees for the Employment of Disabled People	No	No	No	Yes	No
Industrial Research and Technology Board	No	No	No	Yes	No

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20111]

Sir John Wheeler: In respect of all advisory non-departmental bodies in Northern Ireland, the answers to questions *(a)*, *(d)*, (e) and *(f)* is nil. The information requested at questions *(b)* and *(c)* is as follows:

Advisory body

Body	*Conduct public consultation exercises*	*Conduct public consultation exercises with outside interests*
Law Reform Advisory Committee	Yes	No
The Northern Ireland Higher Education Council	Yes on a voluntary basis	No
The Northern Ireland Building Regulation Advisory Committee	Yes on a voluntary basis	No
The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland	Invites representations on published Provisional Revised Recommendations for parliamentary constituencies; may hold public Local Inquiries, all as a matter of statutory requirement	By convention holds talks with the main political parties in NI
Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights	Yes for research purposes	No

In respect of all other advisory non-departmental public bodies in Northern Ireland, the answer is nil.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20483]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Attorney-General what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, if no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20473]

The Attorney-General: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) on 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1007*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Staff

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many staff work in *(a)* the Palace of Westminster and *(b)* each of the outbuildings. [19326]

Mr. Beith: Six hundred and thirty full-time and 80 part-time staff employed by the Commission work in the Palace of Westminster. Five hundred and forty-nine full-time and 82 part-time staff work in other buildings on the parliamentary estate.

Recycling

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what plans there are to discontinue the use of styrofoam cups in refreshment facilities in the Palace of Westminster and the surrounding office buildings. [19290]

Sir Colin Shepherd: This is a matter for the Director of Catering Services; I have ask her to write to the hon. Member.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what plans there are to increase recycling facilities in the Palace of Westminster and the surrounding office buildings in the future. [19294]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The policy of the two Houses of Parliament is to recycle waste whenever possible. Under the waste collection contract for the Palace of Westminster and parliamentary outbuildings the contractor is required to sort waste into its constituent streams. These waste streams are sent for recycling wherever practicable. This process is audited to ensure compliance. In addition, bulk waste paper from the Vote Office and Fees Office is collected separately for recycling.

Any further increases in recycling facilities would be subject to space and staffing constraints.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee when the use of recycled stationery and envelopes began in the Palace of Westminster and the surrounding office buildings. [19295]

Mr. Martin: Stocks of recycled A4 size writing paper with the crowned portcullis embossed plain and in green, blue and red, together with recycled plain post-paid envelopes became available from the Serjeant at Arms Stores with effect from June 1991.

Ms Anderson: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee (1) what plans there are to ensure that all parliamentary stationery and envelopes are derived from recycled material; [19296]

(2) what was the breakdown of the collection of recycled goods for each of the buildings within the parliamentary estate for each year since 1992–93; [19292]

(3) what steps have been taken to ensure that people working in the Palace of Westminster and the surrounding office buildings are aware of recycling initiatives; [19297]

(4) if he will set out the facilities currently available within the Palace of Westminster and the surrounding office buildings for the purpose of recycling; [19293]

(5) what is the average tonnage of *(a)* paper, *(b)* glass, *(c)* metal and *(d)* plastic from the Palace of Westminster and surrounding office buildings recycled each year; [19291]

(6) what studies have been undertaken to determine how much money could be realised through the collection and sale of recycled goods in the Palace of Westminster and the surrounding office buildings; [19289]

(7) if he will list the incentives currently in place in the Palace of Westminster and the surrounding office buildings to promote the use of recycling facilities. [19288]

Mr. Martin: These are matters for the Serjeant at Arms; I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Key: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what differences in cost would arise if all parliamentary stationery and enveloped were derived from recycled material; and if he will make a statement. [20233]

Mr. Martin *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* At present prices it is estimated that the House would save £14,000 per annum if all paper and envelopes were from recycled paper. The hon. Member may be interested to note that recycled paper is now becoming more expensive than good quality paper, whereas 12 months ago it was the reverse, and costs are likely to change.

TREASURY

Child Benefit

Mr. Walden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional revenue which would accrue from taxing child benefit as income. [19346]

Mr. Jack: If child benefit were taxed, the yield for 1996–97 from taxing it as part of the father's or lone mother's income would be about £1,300 million. If it were taxed as part of the mother's or lone father's income, the yield would be about £700 million.

Investment Statistics

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the capital value of *(a)* £1,000, *(b)* £2,000, *(c)* £3,000, *(d)* £4,000 and *(e)* £5,000 invested 18 years ago in (i) Government bonds, (ii) the average building society savings account and (iii) the average unit trust. [18862]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Capital values of £1,000 invested 18 years ago are as follows:

Investment	*Capital value*	*Period of investment*
(i) Government bonds	£7,587	End December 1977 to December 1995
(ii) average building society savings account	data not available over this period	
(iii) Unit trusts	£14,230	End February 1978 to February 1996

The earliest published data for average building society savings account rates start in January 1984. The capital values of £1,000 invested 12 years ago are as follows:

Investment	*Capital value*	*Period of investment*
(i) Government bonds	£3,616	end December 1983 to December 1995
(ii) average building society savings account	£2,295	end December 1983 to December 1995
(iii) unit trusts	£4,795	end December 1983 to December 1995

All the above figures assume that interest and dividend payments are reinvested in the same investment instruments.

Source:

FT Actuaries Government All Stock index of total returns.

Building Societies Commission, published in CSO Financial Statistics.

UK Growth unit trust sector, on an offer to bid basis; data collated by Micropal.

Financial Services Act

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy that it is up to the investor, alone, to identify a breach of section 47 of the Financial Services Act 1986. [19966]

Mrs. Angela Knight: No. It is also for those authorities with prosecution powers under section 47 to take what action they consider appropriate in the light of information they receive.

Farmers Union of Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations his Department has recently received from the Farmers Union of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [20078]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has recently received no representations from the union.

DIY Housebuilders

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims by do-it-yourself housebuilders for the refund of value added tax under the provisions of customs and excise notice number 719 were met in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995. [19646]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Details of the number of claims met in 1993 are not available. The number of claims met— partly estimate—in 1994 was 8,671 and the number met in 1995 was 10,423.

Landfill Tax

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make it his policy that capital already invested by companies in research and installation of the best practicable environmental option for the disposal of waste materials can be set against liability for landfill tax; [19993]

(2) what definition of qualifying material for the lower rate of landfill tax will be the benchmark for fiscal decision; [19994]

(3) what are the fiscal objectives of the landfill tax; [19976]

(4) when he expects to receive the report on the consultation process on the scope of the lower rate of the landfill tax; and if he will publish the results; [19975]

(5) what research he has commissioned into whether reduction in employers' national insurance contributions will provide the intended benefit to industry in relation to the landfill tax; [19979]

(6) if he will consider the zero-rating the landfill tax for those companies whose processes already comply with the environmental objectives of the tax; [19977]

(7) if he will consider extending the scope of the lower rate of landfill tax to include *(a)* waste materials which are commonly termed as inert or inactive, other than those listed in category 1 of the proposed natural waste confiscation system in the Finance Bill; [19978]

(8) what are the environmental objectives of the landfill tax; [19693]

(9) what are the definitions of active and inactive waste used for the purposes of the landfill tax in the consultation exercise on the system for classifying waste for the national waste classification system; [19694]

(10) if water, brine or other natural elements used to carry waste materials for landfill will be included in the weight measure for the landfill tax where they are recycled for re-use; [19695]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The objectives of the landfill tax are essentially environmental. It will play a key part in achieving the aims of the Government's waste strategy in reducing our reliance on landfill and promoting more sustainable alternatives such as waste minimisation, re-use and recovery. In fiscal terms it will also enable us to reduce employer national insurance contributions which will benefit industry by cutting the cost of employment by some £500 million a year, rather more than landfill tax is expected to raise. This follows extensive consultation with

business and marks a shift in the burden of taxation on business, away from employment and towards taxing its environmental impact.

We have included a number of provisions in the legislation which will reinforce the environmental objectives of the tax. The associated proposal for environmental trusts, which has the potential to generate about £100 million of private sector investment for environmental improvement, will complement and reinforce our policies for sustainable waste management.

We also wish to facilitate the recycling and re-use of materials which are sent to landfill sites. Therefore, by agreement with the local customs officer, operators will be able to define tax-free zones within their sites to enable them to carry out non-taxable activities, such as waste separation for recycling and composting. There will also be provision for credits where an operator removes waste from his landfill site for recycling or re-use within 12 months of it being landfilled. And for certain wastes that contain added water to assist with waste disposable or for mineral extraction, local customs officers will be able to agree formulae with operators so that the tax is levied on the naturally occurring weight of the waste, provided that the added water does not increase the risk of pollution through leaching. This will ensure that there is no incentive for operators to reduce the addition of water where it is needed for environmental purposes. The categories of waste to which this applies will be set out in regulations, on which we shall be consulting.

I recognise that, for a range of wastes, landfill will remain the best practical environmental option and I am aware that in some cases industry has been responsible and invested to reduce the pollution potential of its waste. However, the fact that waste from a particular industrial process is disposed of in accordance with the best practical environmental option does not in itself ensure that the full environmental cost of landfill disposal is reflected in the price paid for waste disposal. The underlying purpose of the tax is to make environmental costs explicit and ensure that those contemplating activities with environmental impacts take account of these costs. The tax will also provide an incentive for waste producers to look for new ways to reduce the amount of waste which they produce.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget that there will be two rates of landfill tax—a lower rate for inactive material and a standard rate for other wastes. Customs consulted on a proposal that all wastes falling within category one, the inactive category, of the Department of the Environment's national waste classification scheme should be liable to the lower rate of landfill tax. Inactive wastes are those that do not physically or chemically react, decay or adversely affect other matter with which they come into contact in a way that is likely to give rise to environmental pollution. The term active waste is not one which is used in the context of the landfill tax—wastes which will be liable at the standard rate will be all those which are not inactive or exempt.

In considering what will be included in the list of lower rate materials, we will take account of whether the materials are commonly described as inert or inactive. But that does not necessarily mean listing only those wastes which are set out in category 1 of the waste classification scheme. There are wastes currently listed in other categories of the scheme where the risk of pollution is minimal. We will consider including such materials in the lower rate list in the light of the replies to the consultation exercise.

Customs is currently analysing these replies and will submit its findings to Ministers shortly. Once these have been evaluated, we will announce our decisions and publish a report on the consultation. The Treasury order containing the list of items to be included in the lower rate will be laid during the summer.

Income Tax (Probation Service Trainees)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what considerations led the Inland Revenue not to repay income tax to those probation service trainees from whom it was illegally deducted before 1992; and if he will make a statement. [18507]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* Payments to candidates sponsored by the Home Office to undertake training as probation officers were originally considered to be taxable and tax was deducted by the Home Office. However, following a decision of the special commissioners in 1990, it was accepted that the payments constituted a scholarship and were therefore exempt from tax. Repayments have been made to students who had tax deducted in error back as far as 1985–86. The Inland Revenue is considering further the position for earlier years with its legal advisers.

Tax Office Closures

Ms Coffey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he is undertaking into the proposed closure of the LP30 income tax office in Stockport and the LP12 and LP13 offices in Old Trafford and their relocation to Manchester; and what estimate he has made of the *(a)* cost and *(b)* savings from relocation. [18973]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 March 1996]:* The Inland Revenue is engaged in a programme to reorganise the structure of all local tax and collection offices to ensure the right operational framework is in place to deliver its business objectives. As part of this programme, the controller of Inland Revenue north-west regional office is looking at all London provincial tax offices in the Greater Manchester area together to rationalise accommodation and form a coherent reorganisation package.

Private finance initiative options are under consideration but further detailed work is required before a final decision can be made. Preliminary indications are that the proposed reorganisation will offer significant financial savings as well as providing opportunities to provide a better quality service to the taxpayer and improve the working environment of staff.

National Health Service (VAT)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of total VAT receipts from the NHS in each year from 1979 to 1995. [20266]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* Estimates of the total VAT on expenditure by the NHS are as follows for each year from 1979 to 1994. Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

	£ billion
1979	0.1
1980	0.2
1981	0.2
1982	0.2
1983	0.2
1984	0.3
1985	0.3
1986	0.3
1987	0.4
1988	0.4
1989	0.4
1990	0.6
1991	0.8
1992	1.2
1993	1.3
1994	1.5

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Media Ownership

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations have been received from, or on behalf of, regional newspapers in respect of the cross-media ownership proposals in the Broadcasting Bill; and if she will make a statement. [19339]

Mr. Sproat: My Department has received a large number of letters on this issue from the local newspaper industry. Ministers and officials have met its representatives on many occasions. We have listened carefully to the industry's concerns and amended the Government's proposals in the light of them. We remain of the view, however, that limits on cross-ownership between newspapers and broadcasters are needed both at the national level and at the local level.

Wrecks

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she is taking to ensure the adequate publication of the results of archaeological excavation of designated wreck sites off England and Wales. [19760]

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has responsibility for designated wreck sites in English territorial waters. Those in Welsh waters are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales. The Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites, which advises on all matters concerning designated wreck sites throughout United Kingdom waters, actively encourages licensees to publish results of their investigations. I understand that an independent body is considering a publication recording survey and excavation work on all designated sites since the introduction of the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.

Television Licences

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what powers exists to confiscate the television set from a household where the licence has not been paid and where the owner of the set refuses, or is unable to pay; and if she will make a statement. [19878]

Mr. Sproat: The only penalty available for television licence fee evasion under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949, as amended, is a fine of up to £1,000. Non-payment can lead to the seizure of goods which may be sold to realise the value of the fine, but there is no power for the courts to order seizure of specific goods. In addition, following conviction, the courts in England and Wales have the power to order forfeiture of any property in an offender's possession which was used or was intended to be used in the commission of an offence, irrespective of whether the offender is dealt with in any other way. In making the order, however, the court must have regard to the value of the property and the effects, financial or other, on the offender. We are unaware of any licence evasion cases in which the courts have ordered forfeiture of a TV set.

Deregulation

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what deregulation orders her Department has made under sections 1 to 4 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. [20717]

Mr. Sproat: The Department laid its first deregulation order before the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees on 4 March 1996. This will ease the burden on business by abolishing the existing statutory requirements for television dealers both to register with the BBC and to hold and pay a fee for a dealer demonstration licence.

International Sporting Events

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on her Department's response to the fifth report of the National Heritage Select Committee's report "Bids to Stage International Sporting Events", HC (1994–95) 493. [20716]

Mr. Sproat: My Department responded to the National Heritage Select Committee's report on 11 January and I have today placed copies of the response in the House Libraries.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18651]

Mr. Sproat: This information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interest, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20112]

Mr. Sproat: The following is the information:

(a) None

(b) None

(c) Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art

(d) None

(e) None

(f) None

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20095]

Mr. Sproat: The Theatres Trust has a statutory base.

(a) Library and Information Commission

(b) Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection

Library and Information Commission[1]

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art

Royal Fine Art Commission

Theatres Trust

Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee

(c) (i) None

(ii) Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art

Royal Fine Art Commission

Treasure Trove Reviewing Committee

[1] The Library and Information Commission is less than a year old and has not yet published an annual report. When it does so it will decide if it will lay the report before Parliament.

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buyout consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market testing schemes in her Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19907]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer Friday 8 March 1996]:* Neither my Department nor its two agencies are involved in any bids with either Capita Managed Services or Lusis Business Solutions for any of the five categories mentioned.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the implications of the resignation of John Jasper as chairman of Capital Managed Services Ltd. the liquidation of Midsummer Computer Exchange and his appointment as a director of Lusis Business Solutions on the transfer of the Midsummer contract to Lusis for the supply of software to UK public sector museums. [19782]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer Friday 8 March 1996]:* I have no plans to make such an assessment. The procurement of software by individual museums is a matter for the museums concerned.

Military Knights

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 19 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *63*, if she will state the current level of gross income set by the keeper of the privy purse for the military knights of Windsor. [19440]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer Friday 8 March 1996]:* The current level of gross income set by the keeper of the privy purse for officers wishing to apply for the appointment of military knights of Windsor is £10,000.

Royal Palaces Estate

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list those members of the royal family who occupy self-contained residential accommodation on the occupied royal palaces estate. [19439]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer Friday 8 March 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 February, *Official Report*, column *547*.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the names of the pensioners and the location of their accommodation within the occupied royal palaces estate. [19435]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* There have been several retirements over the past 18 months and there are now 34 pensioners in housing maintained from the grant in aid provided by my Department.

Nine were previous stables staff or are the widows of previous stables staff, four were previously members of the domestic staff or are widows of previous members of the domestic staff, one is the sister of a previous member of the domestic staff, four were previously gatekeepers or are widows of previous gatekeepers, one is the widow of a previous curator at Hampton Court palace, 11 were previously officials in the royal household and four are grace and favour occupants.

One pensioner lives in Marlborough House mews, eight in or adjacent to the Royal mews at Windsor castle, seven in Windsor Home park, eight in Windsor Great park, nine in or near to the Royal mews at Hampton court and one in Hampton court paddocks.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the names of the grace and favour pensioners and the accommodation they have within the occupied royal palaces estate. [19434]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* There are four grace and favour pensioners. One is a cousin of the Queen, one is a retired principal of the foundation of St. Catherine, one is the daughter of a wartime chief of the general staff and one is a former nanny to the Queen's children.

Three of the pensioners are housed in Windsor Great park and one in Windsor Home park.

Windsor Castle

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 17 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *731*, if she will make a statement of the way in which the public funds

contribution to the costs of fire damage to Windsor castle was calculated; and what specific restoration costs will be met from the expected £10.8 million contribution from public funds. [19482]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* Following the fire at Windsor castle, the royal household offered to fund 70 per cent. of the cost of the restoration by opening the state rooms at Buckingham palace to the public and introducing charges for entry to the precincts of Windsor castle. The balance of 30 per cent. was to be found from the existing level of funding provided by my Department for the general maintenance of the estate.

Total expenditure will be split on a 70 per cent. basis and no specific items will be allocated to either tranche.

Prince and Princess of Wales (Accommodation)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what accommodation at Kensington palace is occupied by Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales and her staff. [19365]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The Princess of Wales has an apartment at Kensington palace and two of Her Royal Highness's domestic staff occupy flats there.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what accommodation at St. James's palace is occupied by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and his staff. [19364]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The Prince of Wales has an apartment at St. James's palace. None of his staff has self-contained residential accommodation at St. James's palace, although His Royal Highness's office is there.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Fire Services

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he plans to make an announcement on the role of the fire service arising out of the report of an interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement completed in June 1994. [20274]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) on 6 March, column *231*.

Deregulation

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many regulations relating to safety at work have been *(a)* repealed and *(b)* modified as a result of recommendations by the deregulation unit. [19574]

Mr. Freeman: In its review of regulation, the Health and Safety Commission identified 100 regulations and seven pieces of primary legislation as outdated or unnecessary which could be removed or reformed without reducing necessary protection. This represents 40 per cent. of health and safety regulations affecting the generality of business. The removal of a number of these regulations has also been recommended by the sectorial task forces under Lord Sainsbury, and the deregulation task force, chaired by Mr. Francis Maude, also recommended that the burden of health and safety needed to be significantly reduced.

As a result of these reviews, 12 sets of regulations affecting business generally and 18 other sets now have been removed, as well as some partial repeals such as 53 requirements to display posters and notices.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many regulations have been *(a)* repealed and *(b)* modified as a result of work by the deregulation unit and in which subject areas. [19573]

Mr. Freeman: We have so far repealed or amended over 500 regulations out of a target of over 1,000 regulations. Examples include the simplification of food temperature control regulations which will save business about £40 million per annum and simplification of trade marks legislation which is saving business about £30 million a year. Details of other key areas of reform are identified in "Deregulation: The Way Forward" published in May 1995 and in "The Government's Response to the First Annual Report of the Deregulation Task Force" published in September 1995, copies of which are available in the House Libraries.

Local Government Performance Indicators

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representation he has made to the Audit Commission to receive advance copies of the Audit Commission's local government performance indicators due to be published on 21 March. [20326]

The Deputy Prime Minister: None.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of member' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20116]

Mr. Willetts: The answers to each part of this question are:

(a) The Standing Committee on Standards in Public Life and The Citizens Charter Panel of Advisers.

(b) The Standing Committee on Standards in Public Life and The Citizens Charter Panel of Advisers.

(c) None.

(d) The Standing Committee on Standards in Public Life and The Advisory Committee on Advertising.

(e) None.

(f) None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20103]

Mr. Willetts: None of the advisory non-departmental public bodies, for which I am responsible has a statutory role.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20476]

Mr. Willetts: The information requested is not held centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost. However, the value of invoices paid by the finance division of the Department and its agencies, excluding Security Facilities Executive, during February 1996, which were more than one month old, was £1,476,334.

The value of invoices paid by the Central Office of Information, during February 1996, which were more than one month was £948,314. Information on HMSO is available only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Fire Brigades

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has recently received from the Fire Brigades Union; and if he will make a statement. [19757]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has received three written representations from the Fire Brigades Union and the Fire Brigades Union (Welsh region) about general issues.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many fire brigades in Wales failed to meet the statutory minimum standards for their rescue and firefighting role in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement. [19755]

Mr. Jones: Responsibility for this matter rests with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

EstateCare (Privatisation)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the correspondence pertaining to the decision of his predecessor to direct the chairman and Board of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to privatise its EstateCare division. [19669]

Mr. Hague: My decision on the future of the EstateCare group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, and the work required to implement it, was conveyed via correspondence and meetings between my Department and the authority. These are properly internal management matters.

The Arts

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he proposes to take to ensure adequate regional co-ordination of strategic plans for the arts, with particular reference to the funding of theatres. [20014]

Mr. Hague: The co-ordination of strategic plans is a matter for the Arts Council of Wales and I am asking the chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the information. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Education Spending

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the Government will release additional funds to enable local authorities to maintain the current level of education spending in Wales. [20011]

Mr. Hague: No. My settlement decisions were approved by the House on 8 February. I have no plans to change them.

Red Squirrels

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated number of red squirrels on Anglesey; and if he will make a statement. [19986]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No reliable estimates are available, but work carried out by the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales suggests there are about 50 red squirrels. Subject to the outcome of a local consultation exercise, the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales intend carrying out a trial project designed to bring about the recovery of Anglesey's red squirrel population.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the Government's White Paper for rural Wales will be published; and if he will make a statement. [20719]

Mr. Hague: I will tomorrow publish "A Working Countryside for Wales", the Government's White Paper for rural Wales.

The White Paper has three main themes:

supporting rural communities

promoting vigorous sustainable economic development

and promoting the protection and conservation of the environment.

"A Working Countryside for Wales" represents a significant stage in the Government's development of policies to address the needs of rural Wales. We want to see vibrant communities where the vital spirit of enterprise is encouraged and nurtured. Only by promoting competitive enterprise will we ensure the creation of new jobs and reinvigorated communities. At the same time, we must not lose sight of our shared responsibility to pass on to the next generation a stronger heritage and a cleaner and better protected environment.

Ensuring an effective balance between the potentially conflicting pressures of economic growth while sustaining the environment will be the key to a bright future for our rural communities.

Housing Grants

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each housing association *(a)* grants received from the public purse, indicating what percentage this represents of housing association

spending, *(b)* the average rent for (i) one-bedroomed, (ii) two-bedroomed and (iii) three-bedroomed properties and *(c)* the amounts held in reserves and its per property figure for each of the last five years. [19932]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: These are primarily matters for Housing for Wales and the chief executive has been asked to write to the hon. Member. A copy of his reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20088]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 28 April 1995 by my predecessor, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), *Official Report*, column *728*.

I regret that in that answer the Local Government Boundary Commission was described as under a statutory requirement to publish an annual report and lay it before Parliament; it published its report voluntarily. In addition, the Staff Commission for Wales publishes its advice voluntarily and the National Rivers Authority advisory committee lays an annual report before Parliament voluntarily.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20105]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is as follows:

(a) None;

(b) the Local Government Boundary Commission has a statutory duty to conduct public consultation exercises. The Staff Commission for Wales conducts such exercises voluntarily;

(c) to (f) none.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which *(a)* have a statutory base, *(b)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and, *(c)* hold open meetings for the public; and if in each case this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntarily. [16174]

Mr. Hague *[pursuant to his reply, 22 February 1996, c. 298–99]:* I regret that there were two errors in the original reply.

There is no requirement for the Cardiff Bay development corporation to admit members of the public to its board meetings and access is not allowed because of the commercial in confidence nature of board business. The corporation has held many other meetings voluntarily with the public and the business community about its activities and plans.

The Land Authority for Wales is required to open its board meetings to the public under schedule 1 to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended, but the public may, by resolution, be excluded if the nature of the business is confidential or for other special reasons.

Sea Empress Incident

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which species of *(a)* birds and *(b)* mammals were (i) oiled and (ii) killed in Milford Haven as a result of the incident involving the Sea Empress. [19483]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Details of oiled and dead birds recovered following the Sea Empress oil spill are in the following table. No dead or oiled mammals have been recovered.

Sea Empress spillage: Oiled birds counts to 5 March 1996

Species	*Found dead*	*RSPCA rescued*	*Died in care*
Manx shearwater	1	0	0
Fulmar	1	0	0
Great northern diver	2	4	1
Black throated diver	1	1	0
Red throated diver	10	35	7
Great crested grebe	2	1	0
Red necked grebe	0	4	1
Gannet	2	0	0
Shag	2	11	2
Cormorant	34	0	0
Mute swan	0	15	2
Shelduck	1	0	1
Mallard	0	1	0
Scaup	0	1	0
Scoter	1,427	2,592	594
Velvet scoter	0	3	0
Eider	0	9	1
R–B merganser	0	1	0
Oystercatcher	9	7	3
Turnstone	2	0	0
Black–H gull	2	1	1
Common gull	1	0	0
Herring gull	2	9	2
Kittiwake	2	4	0
Guillemot	720	420	132
Razorbill	178	23	10
Unidentified	143	0	0
Total	2,542	3,142	757

These are minimum figures as the complete data set is not yet available.

There may also be birds which have been picked up and cared for by members of the public, or taken to other bird hospitals which are not included in the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals figures.

Many dead birds will remain at sea, or come ashore in inaccessible places, and not be counted.

Caution should also be noted with regard to the identification of oiled birds.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20488]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Emergency Medical Admissions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *99*, on the emergency admissions action plan, if his meeting with the unitary authorities to discuss budgetary constraints on levels of community care has taken place. [20362]

Mr. Hague: I have no plans to meet local authorities to discuss the provision of community care. The local government settlement is discussed each year with the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. The settlement for 1996–97 includes £146.6 million for community care, an increase of £25.2 million or 20 per cent. on 1995–96. It is for individual local authorities to decide how to use their resources in the light of local needs and priorities, and for health and local authorities to agree locally their respective responsibilities for continuing care.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *99*, on the emergency admissions action plan, when he plans to publish the intensive care unit-bed review. [20363]

Mr. Hague: When all the substantive replies to the intensive care review have been received from health authorities, these will be assessed to establish whether the Department needs to offer further guidance to the NHS in Wales.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *99*, what action he has taken in respect of the undertaking given in the emergency medical admissions plan to co-ordinate the general practitioner out-of-hours scheme. [20364]

Mr. Hague: Action to co-ordinate GP out-of-hours emergency admissions and improve communications with trusts and health authorities remains a matter for the appropriate family health services authority or its successor after 1 April 1996. This is covered in the statement of fees and allowances.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *99*, on the emergency admissions action plan, if the community hospital working group is functioning; and what advice he will be seeking from it in relation to support roles to district general hospitals. [20365]

Mr. Hague: The review by the community hospital working group is nearing completion. Advice will be issued to the service shortly, including guidance on how community hospitals in Wales can most appropriately support district general hospitals.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training Agencies

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many employment training agencies have been created since 1979; and at what costs. [17209]

Mr. Paice: Since 1990, we have set up 74 training and enterprise councils in England and they are responsible for arranging provision locally of a range of training activities. No information is collected about the number of training providers under contract to training and enterprise councils.

Student Statistics

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the proportion of *(a)* male and *(b)* female students undertaking (i) science subjects and (ii) arts subjects, (1) nationally and (2) for Staffordshire education authority. [19490]

Mrs. Gillan: All pupils of statutory school age are required to follow the national curriculum, which covers both science and arts subjects. After the age of 16, students can choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses up to degree level and beyond. Information on the total number of male and female students following science and arts subjects under all these qualifications is unavailable either nationally or locally.

Barnsley and Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for the Barnsley/Doncaster TEC the number of current members of the board representing *(a)* under 50 employees, *(b)* under 20 employees and *(c)* under 10 employees; and what assessment she has made of the adequacy of the current arrangement. [19634]

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise council directors do not represent particular interests; they are appointed as individuals. The TEC has been concerned to provide a balanced board, by geography, industry and commercial sector; the board is currently in the process of electing a new member.

Grant-maintained School Ballots

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions she proposes to hold with Sheffield local education authority in respect of the prevention of interference with, and intimidation of, governors and parents during grant-maintained ballots. [20039]

Mrs. Gillan: None. The Government look to the local education authority and all other parties concerned in a ballot for grant-maintained status to ensure a fair and balanced debate for governors and parents. The Government have sought to promote this through the introduction of a code of practice on information in GM ballots. My officials have from time to time written to all chief education officers about these issues.

In addition, all formal complaints about ballots are investigated under section 31(1) of the 1993 Education Act.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines her Department has issued to parents, governors and local education authorities to ensure fair and accurate information is available for grant-maintained status ballots. [20187]

Mrs. Gillan: Ballots for grant-maintained status are held under a voluntary code of practice which states that information for governors and parents should be objective, accurate and balanced. The code is available to parents through a departmental publication—"How to Become a Grant-Maintained School"—and was commended to governors in circular 18/93. An almost identical code has been promulgated to local education authorities by the Society of Education Officers.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she proposes to take *(a)* in respect of the use of misleading information during balloting for grant-maintained status and *(b)* to ensure that balloting can take place without the interference or intimidation of governors and parents. [20038]

Mrs. Gillan: The Government are committed to ensuring a fair and balanced debate for governors and parents in ballots for grant-maintained status. A number of measures are already in place to help secure this. The voluntary code of practice on information in ballots for grant-maintained status is binding on LEA officials, officials from the Department and employees of the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation. Measures in the 1993 Education Act enable a ballot to be declared void and re-run where it appears that there are irregularities in the conduct of the ballot or the outcome has been significantly influenced by the circulation to parents of materially misleading information.

Social Fund

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what provision will be made for the continued participation of the voluntary sector under the European social fund objective 3 programme for the period 1997 to 1999. [10029]

Mr. Forth: The voluntary sector will continue to be a partner in the European social fund objective 3 programme for the period 1997 to 1999 being able to bid for funds and having an involvement in the selection of projects.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to ensure that the voluntary sector organisations in receipt of grant aid under the European social fund objective 3 programme do not face a shortfall in funding in respect of 1994 payments as a result of fluctuations in the exchange rate between sterling and the ecu. [20031]

Mr. Forth: The 1994 final payment has been received from the European Commission in ecu but when converted into sterling it is insufficient to pay all final claims. Officials in the Department's European social fund unit are working with the Commission to try to make up the shortfall. Project providers are being asked to supply information about the pattern of expenditure during 1994, which should help the European social fund unit to make a more favourable calculation of the sums due to Great Britain. The reaction of Commission officials to our approaches to date has been constructive.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to change the allocation of resources and method of distribution under the European social fund objective 3 programme. [20028]

Mr. Forth: Officials have been asked to report by April on the possibility of managing the selection of European social fund objective 3 projects on a regional basis. Any changes will be agreed with the Commission as part of the 1997–99 programme and will involve European social fund partners.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the European Commission in relation to delays in payments to voluntary sector organisations under the European social fund. [20030]

Mr. Forth: I have had no recent discussions with representatives of the European Commission about delays in payment of European social fund money to voluntary sector organisations. Officials in the Department's European social fund unit do, however, meet their counterparts in the European Commission on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues including delays in payment.

Sheffield Local Education Authority

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of local education authority funding is retained for administration by Sheffield local education authority; how much of this was delegated to support services for each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [20040]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table sets out Sheffield local education authority's expenditure in the last thee years, as a percentage of its total education spending, on *(a)* management and administration and services strategy and regulation; *(b)* inspection and advisory services; *(c)* other education support services, including the education welfare service, educational psychology services and operational units; and *(d)* school catering services.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
(a)	3.4	3.4	3.9
(b)	0.5	0.2	0.4
(c)	2.3	2.6	2.7
(d)	3.7	4.2	4.0

Unemployment Statistics

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many people who have been found capable of work under the all-work test of capacity who have subsequently signed on as unemployed receive *(a)* unemployment benefit only, *(b)* income support only and *(c)* unemployment benefit and income support; [20163]

(2) how many people who have been found capable of work under the all-work test of capacity have subsequently signed on as unemployed *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each of the months since April 1995. [20164]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 12 March 1996.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your questions about the number of people found capable of work under the All Work Test who subsequently sign on as unemployed. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

In the period April 1995 to January 1996, 27,719 people disallowed Income Support following the All Work Test have made a claim to unemployment benefits. A monthly breakdown of these claims is attached. No figures are available as to whether these people are receiving unemployment benefit only, Income Support only or unemployment benefit and Income Support.

I hope this is helpful.

April 1995 to January 1996

Month	*Number of claims*	*Cumulative total*
April	—	—
May	428	428
June	518	938
July	1,448	2,386
August	2,880	5,266
September	3,708	8,974
October	4,519	13,493
November	5,059	18,552
December	4,366	22,918
January	4,801	27,719

Temporary School Buildings

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list for each education authority in England and in total the proportion of temporary buildings as a percentage of school buildings as a whole; [20489]

(2) if she will list for each education authority in England *(a)* the number and types of temporary school buildings which have been in use in each year since 1990 and *(b)* the purpose for which these units have been used. [20490]

Mrs. Gillan: This information is not collected centrally.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20101]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Name	*Statutory base*	*Publish advice*	*Publish annual report*
National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities	Yes	Yes	No[1]
Race Relations Employment Advisory Group	No	No	No
Women's National Commission	No	Yes	No[2]
Committees for the Employment of People with Disabilities	Yes	No	No
Supported Employment Consultative Group	No	No	No

[1] A periodic report of activities is placed in the Library of both Houses of Parliament.
[2] An annual report is produced which is not laid before Parliament, but is sent voluntarily to Members of Parliament.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what values of payments were outstanding within her Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20477]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information required could be provided only at disproportionate cost to the Department. The Department does not maintain the statistical information in this form.

Careers Service

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received about plans to close the careers service office in Hulme, Manchester; and what discussions she has held with the local careers service. [19839]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no representations about the closure of any careers service office in the Hulme area of Manchester.

The existing contract between the Department and the careers service provider in Manchester recognised the need to review a number of issues, including premises. This review has now been completed and proposals arising from it will be a matter for discussion with the Department by the end of March 1996.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what directions she has issued to the careers service in Manchester, Salford, Trafford and Tameside about the need to maintain levels of service in inner-city areas. [19838]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* The service expected from careers service providers is specified in "The Requirements and Guidance for Careers Service Providers." This describes the service required, the principals on which it should be based, and the standards to which it must be delivered.

Substantial amounts of careers service activity takes place within schools, and so is delivered to students in situ. For other clients, services should be available at times which are convenient to them, prominently displayed, and within reasonable daily travelling distance. These matters are clearly set out in the contract between the Department and the respective careers service provider. They include a strong focus on meeting clients' needs, taking into account any relevant factors impinging on clients in inner-city areas.

Maritime Skills

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department spent in the last financial year on courses to provide education and training in maritime skills; and where such courses are provided at *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* tertiary levels. [20195]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* Such information is not held centrally.

TRANSPORT

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all cases since 1987 in which his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19464]

Mr. Norris: Since 1987 the Department of Transport has bought computer capacity from:

(a) other Departments—NIL.

(b) the Private Sector:

Dell Computer Corporation

Electronic Data Systems

P and P Corporate Systems Limited

The value of the contracts is classified "commercial in confidence".

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19424]

Mr. Norris: Between January 1994 to date—the only period for which figures are available—1,707 letters from hon. Members have been referred to agencies for response. This represents approximately 3 per cent. of the total.

With regard to point *(b)*, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 12 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *421*.

Fishes Royal Wreck

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the nature of the responsibility that the receiver of wrecks has for Fishes Royal. [19879]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 12 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the Receiver of Wreck.

The Receiver of Wreck is responsible for the disposal of "Fishes Royal" which become stranded in or on the shores of the United Kingdom. Since 1993 this has been a responsibility of the Coastguard Agency.

Coastguard

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the Coastguard's national constituency plan. [19880]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 12 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the Coastguard Agency's Marine Pollution Control Unit's National Contingency Plan.

A copy of this document is already in the House of Commons' Library.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what amount of compensation for previous investments Railtrack will be required to pay to local authorities and passenger transport authorities before privatisation; and if this amount will be included in the writing off of Railtrack's debts before privatisation. [19861]

Mr. Watts: The British Railways Board executed deeds of assumption in March 1994 to compensate passenger transport executives for the loss of pre-April 1994 lower costs that BR had charged in return for PTE capital grants. Deeds relating to infrastructure were transferred to Railtrack by way of the Railtrack transfer scheme in March 1994. Further deeds were executed by Railtrack in July 1995. In 1995–96, Railtrack made payments of £69.9 million to the PTEs, net of tax withholdings, under the deeds of assumption. Railtrack is currently scheduled to pay a further £5.2 million, net of tax withholdings, on 1 April 1996. Final details of the capital structure which Railtrack will take into the private sector have yet to be concluded.

Railway Contracts

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *485*, what is the total number and value of contracts let by Railtrack to Hall and Tawse. [19895]

Mr. Watts: I understand that Railtrack plc have awarded two planned maintenance and two call-off maintenance contracts to Hall and Tawse, having a value of circa £5 million.

St. Pancras Station

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of St. Pancras station; and what value was attached to the asset. [20304]

Mr. Watts: The last valuation of St. Pancras station was carried out for the British Rail Property Board in March 1995. Based on the capitalisation of station income, the existing use value of the station was estimated to be £3.7 million.

Leicester Link Road Inquiry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations led him to restrict the remit of the Department of Transport inspector for the Leicester A46/47 link road public inquiry to the A46/47 link road only. [20041]

Mr. Watts: The remit of the inspector appointed to conduct the inquiries into Leicester county council's proposed A46/47 link road was that he should consider objections to, and representations about, the proposed orders. No restriction was made, apart from that made in every case, that the inspector should resist broadening his considerations into matters which are not directly involved with the proposed orders.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration was given to problems of induced traffic on new road schemes and their surrounding areas in the recent public inquiry into the Leicester A46/47 link road. [20042]

Mr. Watts: The issue of induced traffic was covered at the inquiries into Leicestershire county council's proposed A46/A47 link road. The Secretary of State is currently considering the inspector's report on those inquiries including the question of induced traffic.

Car Parking

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is being taken to relieve car parking problems in urban areas; and if he will make a statement. [20075]

Mr. Norris: Detailed decisions about local parking policies and practice are matters for local authorities. The Government set the framework by issuing advice and guidance. Urban areas need adequate parking provision to cater for trips for which there is no realistic alternative form of transport. It is the Government's policy to encourage people to travel by other means—cycling, walking and public transport—where that option is open to them.

Union Railways

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on recent developments relating to the work of Union Railways. [20324]

Mr. Watts: Union Railways is continuing its work in developing plans for the channel tunnel rail link. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 29 February, ownership of Union Railways will be transferred to London and Continental Railways as a result of the CTRL competition.

Wisconsin Central

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the value of the contract awarded to Wisconsin Central to *(a)* operate the royal train, *(b)* carry the Royal Mail and *(c)* run other aspects of the railway; [20496]

(2) what period is covered by the contract awarded to Wisconsin Central to operate the royal train. [20497]

Mr. Watts: This information is commercially confidential.

Braer Incident

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many claims, and for what amount, there were for compensation in respect of the Braer incident in the Shetlands; what percentage of such claims has been accepted by the insurers and, of those, what percentage has been settled; what is the percentage of the amount claimed that has been paid; and if he will make a statement. [20242]

Mr. Norris: Information on the total amount claimed is not held by the Department and is not readily available from the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund. Records produced by the fund indicate that 1,950 claims have been made, some 1,700 or about 85 per cent. of these claims have been agreed and some 1,500 or about 75 per cent. have been paid. To date, £46.9 million has been paid.

Sea Empress Incident

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to demand full compensation payments for all those who directly or indirectly have suffered financial loss as a result of the Sea Empress disaster; and if he will make a statement. [20248]

Mr. Norris: Officials of my Department have already made representations to the executive committee of the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund for full payment of eligible claims for compensation, insofar as these payments are compatible with the international instruments which established the IOPC fund.

Humber Sea Terminal Project

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement regarding his Department's objections to European regional development fund funding for the Humber sea terminal project being proposed at Immingham. [20398]

Mr. Norris: A decision on whether my Department could support the provision of ERDF grant for this project will be made shortly. The decision will be based on the view the Department takes about whether such grant would cause substantial distortion of competition with other ports in Great Britain. The Government's successful ports policy over the past 15 years has been based on the avoidance of such distortion, and creating conditions in which ports can compete on an equal footing.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interest, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20107]

Mr. Norris: The following are the answers for the Department of Transport's only advisory, NDPB, the Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee.

(a) DPTAC does not hold public meetings.

(b) Yes, but the Committee has not held a public consultation exercise since 1990.

(c) Yes, it does conduct exercises with outside commercial interests.

(d), (e) and (f) No, it does not publish a register of interests, agendas of meetings or minutes of meetings.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20090]

Mr. Norris: The following are the answers for the Department of Transport's only advisory NDPB, the Disabled Person's Transport Advisory Committee.

(a) DPTAC does not publish advice to the Government.

(b) and (c) It publishes an annual report which is laid before Parliament under a statutory requirement.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal accidents involving heavy goods vehicles have occurred in each of the last five years arising from the driver having lost his spectacles or contact lenses during an emergency. [20361]

Mr. Norris: This information is not available.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20486]

Mr. Norris: The information is not available.

North-West Main Line

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, columns 730-31, if he will list the improvements currently planned for the North-West main line and the likely date of implementation; and if he will make a statement on proposals for *(a)* improved journey times between Manchester and London, *(b)* improved passenger access to cross-channel services and *(c)* improved customer comfort and convenience on the Manchester to London line. [19884]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack's core modernisation programme for the west coast main line includes the introduction of a modern train signalling system, an improved power supply system, and track renewal. Railtrack intends to let a contract for development of the signalling system by the end of March with contracts for the bulk of the modernisation to be let during 1996.

Beyond the core modernisation, Railtrack is also considering possible upgrade options for the line which would include opportunities for faster trains and improved journey times between London and Manchester.

London and Continental Railways proposals for the channel tunnel rail link include an action plan for enhancing Eurostar services from the regions which would include a direct twin-track connection to the west coast main line.

InterCity west coast is currently examining proposals with private leasing companies for the refurbishment of passenger coaches.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the national regulations, orders and rules which apply to bovine animals of under 15 days of age. [19888]

Mrs. Browning: There are nearly 3,500 provisions in UK legislation relating to animals, many of which will apply to calves. These provisions can be found in volume 2 of the current editions of Halsbury's Statutes and Halsbury's Statutory Instruments, copies of which can be found in the Library of the House.

The only legislation which includes provisions referring to bovine animals under 15 days of age is European Council directive 64/432/EEC, which is implemented in Great Britain by the Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1995.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will announce the results of his inquiry into the allegations contained in the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme on the inspection of calves exported through Dover. [19896]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 5 March 1996, *Official Report* column *126*.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* bovine, *(b)* ovine and *(c)* porcine animals were rejected at the point of export health certification as unfit to travel for each month of 1995. [19887]

Mrs. Browning: The number of cattle, sheep and pigs rejected at the point of export certification as unfit to travel for each month of 1995 is summarised in the table:

Month	*Cattle*	*Sheep*	*Pigs*
January	171	987	101
February	89	523	83
March	135	367	101

Month	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs
April	134	323	93
May	180	122	153
June	117	123	121
July	129	270	106
August	178	737	45
September	117	725	54
October	64	812	123
November	56	621	74
December	50	676	95

Cattle and Sheep Quotas

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the United Kingdom quota for *(a)* beef, *(b)* cows and *(c)* sheep; and if he will indicate the number in each case allocated to (i) less favoured areas and (ii) non-less favoured areas in each of the component parts of the United Kingdom. [19827]

Mr. Baldry: There are no quotas for beef. The approximate amount of quota available to the UK for sheep and suckler cows is set out in the table.

	In thousands of quota units		
	LFA	*Lowland*	*Total*
Sheep			
England	3,639	4,974	8,613
Scotland	3,876	405	4,280
Wales	4,823	499	5,322
Northern Ireland	1,118	308	1,426
Total	13,455	6,185	19,640
Suckler cows			
England	279	448	727
Scotland	449	77	527
Wales	189	22	211
Northern Ireland	279	51	330
Total	1,197	598	1,795

Sub-totals may not add up to owing to rounding.

Radiation (Livestock)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in respect of which areas restricted as a result of radiation from Chernobyl, livestock are classified as not fit for human consumption. [19659]

Mrs. Browning: Following the latest derestrictions, which took effect from 17 January 1996, about 122,600 hectares of land in the UK remain subject to statutory restrictions to prevent the sale of sheepmeat containing levels of radiocaesium in excess of an action level of 1,000 becquerels per kilogram. These restrictions apply in parts of north Wales, parts of west Cumbria, parts of County Antrim and County Londonderry in Northern Ireland, and parts of Dumfries and Galloway, Strathclyde and Central regions of Scotland.

Sheep grazing these areas are the only livestock affected by the restrictions. The mark and release scheme ensures that radiocaesium levels in sheep are at an acceptable level before the meat reaches the human food chain.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the pattern of voting in the Council of Ministers required to amend common fisheries policy regulations on quota hopping. [19999]

Mr. Baldry: The regulations implementing the common fisheries policy are based on article 43 of the EC treaty under which decisions are taken by qualified majority voting.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what Her Majesty's Government's objectives for the reform of the common fisheries policy are for 1997; and if he will meet hon. Members from fisheries constituencies before the IGC to discuss those objectives. [19998]

Mr. Baldry: I am always happy to meet hon. Members from fishing constituencies from wherever in the United Kingdom to discuss fisheries issues and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland is similarly happy to meet hon. Members from Scottish fishing constituencies.

The Government will continue to pursue initiatives to achieve improvements in the way that the common fisheries policy operates. These include working with the industry to improve conservation measures and seeking to ensure that the fishing opportunities arising from national quotas provide real benefits to the fishing communities of the flag member state.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the Scottish Fisherman's Federation and the National Federation of Fisherman's Organisations to discuss *(a)* the common fisheries policy and *(b)* its place in the IGC discussions in March. [19996]

Mr. Baldry: During the Council of Fisheries Ministers of 21 to 22 December 1995, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland and I met both the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations to discuss those aspects of the common fisheries policy on the agenda of the Council. We shall next be meeting the two organisations together on 14 March.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what legal advice has been sought by his Department on making amendments to the European treaties in connection with quota hopping at the IGC. [19997]

Mr. Baldry: Any necessary legal advice will be obtained for any amendments to the European treaties put forward by the Government. It is not customary, however, to disclose such advice.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20475]

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is not readily available and could not be produced without disproportionate cost. MAFF aims to pay all invoices within 30 days of the receipt or in accordance with terms agreed with suppliers. Currently 85 per cent. of all payments are made by the due date.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pages of guidance notes have been issued by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* regulatory authorities and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last three years. [18650]

Mr. Boswell: This information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive a copy of the forthcoming European Commission discussion document on vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements; and what plans he has to ensure that *(a)* copies of that document are available immediately upon its publication to (i) the Society for the Promotion of Nutritional Therapy, (ii) other organisations representing practitioners of nutritional therapy and (iii) organisations representing consumers of dietary supplements, and *(b)* British consumers' access to such supplements is not adversely affected by any directive arising out of the consultation on that document. [19671]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The timetable for the production of the proposed discussion document on vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements is in the hands of the European Commission. I understand that it is unlikely to be issued before the summer. The Ministry has undertaken to consult fully with all interested parties, including the Society for the Promotion of Nutritional Therapy and organisations representing consumers of dietary supplements, as soon as the document is received. The consultation exercise will also be announced in the food safety information bulletin.

The Government's policy is to ensure that consumers have as much choice as possible in their access to vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements, provided that public health is not compromised. If any formal proposal for legislation on the sale of dietary supplements were to be made following discussion of the document, the United Kingdom position would reflect this policy.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what drafts of the forthcoming European Commission discussion document on vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements his Department has received; and if he will place copies of these drafts in the Library. [19672]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* My Department has not received any drafts of the forthcoming European Commission discussion document on vitamins, minerals and other dietary supplements.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy on the availability of vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements. [19673]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The Government's policy is to ensure that consumers have as much choice as possible in their access to vitamin, mineral and other dietary supplements, provided that public health is not compromised.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many professional scientists and engineers of each category were employed at each grade in the headquarters division of his Department in each year from 1991 to the current year. [19798]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The numbers of qualified engineers employed in my Department in the headquarters division of flood and coastal defence, excluding those based outside London, are as follows:

At 1 March:

1991: 8

1992: 6

1993: 7

1994: 7

1995: 7

1996: 6

A number of those employed in the headquarters building and estates management division also hold engineering qualifications.

The numbers of full-time equivalent staff employed in the scientific grades in the headquarters divisions now represented by the chief scientist's group and the food safety and science group are as follows:

At 1 March

	[1]*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Assistant scientific officer	12	2	2	1	1	1
Scientific officer	37	17	14	18	12	13.6
Higher scientific officer	40.5	31	28.5	32	38.5	34.8
Senior scientific officer	28	33	31.5	32	34.5	29.4
Principal scientific officer	27.5	21	21	33.5	25.5	20.4

[1] Figures for 1991 include staff based at the food science laboratory, Norwich.

For open structure grades above grade 7, records do not separately identify posts held by staff with scientific qualifications. However, it is possible to give the following breakdown for senior grades in the headquarters divisions of the chief scientist's group and the food safety and science group as of 1 March 1996:

	Postholders whose qualifications include a scientific degree or equivalent
Grade 6	16
Grade 5	5
Grade 3	2

These figures include those on fixed-term appointments, but exclude any employed on a consultancy basis.

All the figures given apply to core Department headquarters divisions only. They do not include the large numbers of staff in other areas who hold scientific or

engineering qualifications, for example, those in the directorate of fisheries research, many of the employees of the agencies, veterinary surgeons, economists and statisticians. It would be disproportionately expensive to list all of these.

HEALTH

Disability Living Allowance

13. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the number of people with disabilities, including learning disabilities, living in national health service hospitals or residential accommodation who currently receive the mobility component of the disability living allowance. [18397]

Mr. Bowis: The Department of Health does not collect this information centrally.

26. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on how the changes to the disability living allowance regulations have affected current NHS patients. [18410]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner).

NHS Trust Boards

15. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with disabilities are members of national health service trust boards *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the overall total. [18399]

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with disabilities are members of NHS trust boards; and what percentage this is of the total. [18391]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available.

17. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the representation on health boards of disabled people. [18401]

Mr. Malone: None. People from all sections of the community are encouraged to apply for non-executive appointments to national health service boards and several with disabilities have been appointed. They represent the interest of all sections of the community.

GP Fundholders

16. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients in England are currently covered by general practitioner fundholders; and what the figures will be after 1 April. [18400]

Mr. Malone: Some 41 per cent. of the population in England is currently registered with a general practitioner fundholder. We expect this to increase to more than 50 per cent. from April.

Care in the Community

18. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the Care in the Community (Direct Payments) Bill from groups of, and for, people with disabilities. [18402]

Mr. Bowis: Some 300 responses have been received to our consultation paper.

General Practitioners

19. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to ensure an adequate future supply of general practitioners in the national health service. [18403]

Mr. Malone: The goal of the Government's medical staffing policy is to enable the national health service to secure an adequate and affordable supply of appropriately trained doctors in each sector and/or specialty, in order to provide a cost-effective, quality service to patients. We accepted the main recommendation in the second report of the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee, June 1995, to increase medical school intakes to 4,970 by 2000, which will mean an increase of 15 per cent. during the 1990s.

Clinical Staff

21. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends taking to improve the morale of clinical staff in the NHS. [18405]

Mr. Malone: It is the responsibility of local employers to ensure good morale is maintained within the clinical work force. They now have greater freedoms than ever before to develop local employment strategies and implement flexible working arrangements which reflect and reward the valuable contribution of highly motivated and skilled staff.

Clinical Services

22. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairmen of regional health authorities to discuss the private management of clinical services. [18406]

Mr. Malone: We regularly meet the chairmen of the regional health authorities who are members of the national health service policy board to discuss a wide range of issues.

Community Care

23. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he takes to review the operation of the NHS and Community Care Act 1990. [18407]

Mr. Malone: I am satisfied that the reforms introduced by the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 are operating effectively. NHS performance continues to improve. Since 1990, the average waiting time has been halved from eight months to just under four months. Patient activity has grown by around 5 per cent. each year since the reforms, significantly greater than before.

NHS Funding (Nottingham)

24. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the amount by which current funding of the NHS in Nottingham is under target; and what action he plans to meet the target. [18408]

Mr. Horam: Nottingham health authority will be £7.4 million or 2.74 per cent. under target in 1996–97.

We plan to move all health authorities to their weighted capitation target as soon as it is practicable.

Royal Sussex County Hospital

25. **Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects phase I of the building programme for the Royal Sussex county hospital in Brighton to be completed; and what is the estimated cost of the work in current prices. [18409]

Mr. Horam: The building is expected to be completed in the late summer of 1998, and to cost £61 million at current prices.

Dermatology

27. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is proposing to advance the expenditure on dermatology and skin-related diseases in the health service. [18411]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities in England are given general allocations for hospital and community health services to purchase health care services for their resident population. It is for individual health authorities to decide the level and type of services purchased, taking account of local circumstances, and within the framework of national policies and priorities.

Ecstasy-related Deaths

28. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of deaths in the past five years in which Ecstasy was *(a)* mentioned as a contributory cause and *(b)* identified as the principal cause. [18412]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State gave him on 19 February, column *34* and the reply that I gave him on 1 March, column *764*.

Injured Suspects

29. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he issues to hospitals about giving the police the names and addresses of injured suspects. [18413]

Mr. Horam: All national health service bodies and staff have a legal duty to protect patient confidentiality and health information given or obtained for one purpose should not usually be used for a different purpose without the express consent or implied authorisation of the provider of the information. This duty of confidence can be overridden, most commonly when considered necessary in the public interest and this may include circumstances where the disclosure is relevant to the prevention or detection of serious crime. Any decision to do so would need to be taken locally after full consideration of the individual details of the case.

This reinforced in guidance issued to the NHS on 7 March, "Protection and Use of Patient Information", copies of which are available in the Library.

Casualty Departments

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the temporary closure of casualty departments. [18404]

Mr. Horam: The organisation of hospitals locally is a matter for health authorities and national health service trusts. Temporary closures of accident and emergency departments will occasionally be necessary but should be kept to a minimum, with alternative arrangements being made with neighbouring hospitals and the ambulance service.

Transplant Surgery

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the number of people awaiting suitable donations prior to transplant surgery for each organ required; what is the average length of time waited; how many and what percentage of people die while waiting; and if he will provide figures by *(a)* region, *(b)* age and *(c)* sex; [18801]

(2) how many organs offered for donation were used; what percentage this was of the total offered; and what is his estimate of the potential number of organ donors in each of the last three full years for which figures are available. [18800]

Mr. Horam: The tables show the information requested.

(1) Breakdown of current (1 March 1996) waiting list for each organ

(a) By region

Region	*Kidney*	*Heart*	*Lung*	*Heart/lung*	*Liver*
Northern and Yorkshire	497	26	62	11	20
Trent	445	40	14	2	—
Anglia and Oxford	375	9	21	25	25
North Thames	883	112	78	119	21
South Thames	568	27	8	1	33
South West	452	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	556	12	6	5	40
North West	624	40	20	3	—
Wales	132	—	—	—	—
Northern Ireland	97	—	—	—	—
Scotland	559	20	—	—	6
Republic of Ireland	92	23	—	1	12
Total	5,280	309	209	167	157

(b) By sex

Sex	*Kidney*	*Heart*	*Lung*	*Heart/Lung*	*Liver*
Female	2,172	40	117	92	67
Male	3,105	268	92	75	90
Unknown	3	1	—	—	—
Total	5,280	309	209	167	157

(c) By age (decade)

Age (years)	*Kidney*	*Heart*	*Lung*	*Heart/Lung*	*Liver*
0–9	53	14	—	12	18
10–19	144	8	7	46	12
20–29	626	11	22	50	13
30–39	1,059	16	21	30	18
40–49	1,174	67	66	20	32
50–59	1,236	151	72	9	46
60–69	822	42	21	—	18
70–79	162	—	—	—	—
80–89	4	—	—	—	—
Total	5,280	309	209	167	157

Waiting time (days)

	Kidney	*Heart*	*Lung*	*Heart/Lung*	*Liver*
Median	387	177	351	560	26
(95 per cent. Confidence Interval	373–404	157–203	288–401	452–686	23–29)

Based on figures for 1989–92.

(2) Patients dying whilst on the waiting list in 1994

	Kidney	*Heart*	*Lung*	*Heart/Lung*	*Liver*
Number of patients	[1]197	57	19	23	46

[1] This is the figure for 1993. The figure for number of patients dying whilst on the waiting list for a kidney can be misleading as a proportion will die as a result of causes unrelated to their renal condition.

Breakdown of number of offered organs and their usage in 1995

Organ	*Number offered*	*Number transplanted*	*Percentage transplanted*
Kidney	1,987	1,799	90.5 per cent.
Heart	885	397	44.9 per cent.
Lung	1,250	274	21.9 per cent.
Livers	927	701	75.6 per cent.

Hearts and lungs have been simplified to individual organs. In practice, they are often offered in combination and sometimes transplanted in combination—that is, the heart and lungs from a donor can be offered as a "block" and the heart transplanted and the lungs not, and so on. Also, on a few occasions, a liver was transplanted (as lobes) into two separate patients. The reason for the non-use of donated organs, in the vast majority of cases is clinical unsuitability.

It is not known what the potential number of organ donors was for the last three years.

Source:

UK Transport Support Service Authority.

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19033]

Mr. Horam: For the purpose of the table, items stolen and otherwise unaccounted for are combined because it is not possible in all cases to distinguish one from the other. The losses of information technology equipment have occurred against the background of a substantial increase in the Department's provision of such equipment, and an increasing frequency of break-ins by professional criminals in search of computers and their components. The Department constantly reviews its security measures in the light of these losses.

Calender year	*IT items (number)*	*IT items (estimated cost) £*	*Other items (number)*	*Other items (estimated cost) £*
1991	6	7,460	14	3,340
1992	11	25,710	—	—
1993	55	93,080	27	3,880
1994	136	147,358	20	1,852
1995	350	231,249	31	771

Items valued at £5,000 or more are a Toshiba T6600/DX2 laptop computer, cost £5,500; a Sun Sparcserver (including disk and memory) cost £25,590; a RAID Array, cost £23,120 and a Toshiba 3200 laptop with Feline Analyser Board, cost £8,000.

NHS Staff Shortages

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what categories of qualified staff he has identified as being in short supply in respect of NHS hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [19257]

Mr. Malone: For nurses, midwives and health visitors we agree with the findings of the national pay review body, which weighed carefully all the evidence presented and was not convinced that there is a general nationwide shortage of nursing staff. The Government accept that there are local difficulties and problems with particular specialties for some non-medical staff and drew attention to these in the 1995 annual planning guidance. Training commissions are likely to rise again in 1996–97. The Government welcome the pay review body's view that local pay may be part of the solution to these problems.

In relation to professions allied to medicine, the Government accept that demand exceeds supply in some areas for some professions allied to medicine. Good employers will concentrate on establishing flexible recruitment and retention policies and training commissions are likely to rise again in 1996–97.

In respect of the medical work force we are aware of the difficulties in recruiting to consultant posts in certain specialties. In 1996–97, £5.7 million will be provided to help create at least 300 new specialist registrar posts and to improve access to training for doctors wishing to become consultants. The available resources will be targeted where needs are greatest. Where there are isolated problems local problems of recruitment and retention, moves towards local pay determination will encourage employers to use pay flexibility to tackle them.

In the long term, the Government have accepted the recommendations of the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee to increase the medical student intake target by 500–11 per cent.—to reach, 4,970 by 2000.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Heath what is the average time of waiting between a child being referred for speech therapy, an assessment taking place and referral for treatment. [19741]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children and adults are currently in receipt of speech therapy in the city of Liverpool; how many requests for treatment are outstanding; how many assessments are undertaken each month; what is the ration of speech therapists to patients in need of speech therapy; what funding is currently available for paediatric and adult services; what is the shortfall between demand and provision of services; and if he will make a statement. [19761]

Mr. Bowis: The number of new episodes of care (initial contacts) for speech and language therapy in 1994–95 delivered at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital national health service trust, the Royal Liverpool Children's national health service trust, Broadgreen Hospital national health service trust and the North Mersey Community national health service trust was 4,348.

Breakdown by age is as follows:

Age group	*Number*
0–2	486
3–4	971
5–9	988
10–15	227
16–54	435
55–64	255
65–74	388
75–84	422
85 and over	176
Total all ages	4,348

The other information is not available centrally.

Secure Units

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health authorities among the 68 whose plans anticipate the development of comprehensive mental health services before the end of 1996–97 which *(a)* will and *(b)* will not be providing local secure units. [19820]

Mr. Bowis: The regional offices of the national health service executive will be closely monitoring the progress of all health authorities towards developing the full spectrum of care required for a comprehensive mental health service. This includes commissioning of care for patients in local units, or access to specialist secure units which may be located out of the patient's home area.

Tri-Star Ambulances

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which national health service ambulance trusts currently maintain Tri-Star vehicles of the chassis type alleged to exceed allowable load ratings; and, for each trust *(a)* how many of such vehicles are in use and *(b)* how long such vehicles have spent withdrawn from service in each of the last three years; and what are the corresponding figures for (i) other Tri-Star vehicles and (ii) non-Tri-Star vehicles. [19688]

Mr. Horam: The East Anglian ambulance national health service trust and/or its predecessors have purchased 39 Tri-Star vehicles, of which 19 have been withdrawn from service since January 1995 pending precautionary modifications to the chassis. The remaining 20 were different versions of the vehicle and continue in use. Other information requested is not available centrally.

Schizophrenia

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number and percentage of discharges of patients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia by length of stay from 1984 until latest available date [19822]

Mr. Bowis: The available information is shown in the table.

Estimated number of discharges from NHS hospitals of patients with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenic psychoses by duration of spell

England

	[1]*1984*		[1]*1985*		[1]*1986*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Total	30,080	100	30,600	100	30,400	100
Under 1 week	4,220	14	4,560	15	4,320	14
1 week—under 1 month	11,030	37	11,440	37	11,260	37
1 month—under 2 months	6,460	21	6,410	21	6,310	21
2 months—under 3 months	2,470	8	2,560	8	2,550	8
3 months—under 6 months	2,440	8	2,450	8	2,510	8
6 months—under 1 year	1,330	4	1,290	4	1,390	5
1 year—under 2 years	720	2	560	2	610	2
2 years—under 5 years	530	2	440	1	400	1
5 years or more	900	3	890	3	1,030	3

Source:

1984 to 1986: Mental Health Enquiry.

[1] Data for 1984 to 1986 are taken from the Mental Health Enquiry and are on a different basis to those for subsequent years—they include patients diagnosed as suffering from paranoia. There were 3,040 such patients in 1984. Data from 1987–89 are unreliable.

	1990–91		1991–91		1992–93		1993–94	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Total	29,760	100	29,910	100	31,210	100	29,750	100
Under one week	4,620	16	4,770	16	5,170	17	5,070	17
One week–under one month	10,620	36	10,690	36	11,160	36	10,240	35
One month–under two months	5,540	19	5,730	19	5,940	19	5,810	19
Two months–under three months	2,460	8	2,560	9	2,800	9	2,640	9
Three months–under six months	2,850	10	2,750	9	2,910	9	2,990	10
Six months–under one year	1,430	5	1,470	5	1,420	5	1,350	5
One year–under two years	590	2	560	2	590	2	580	2
Two years–under five years	460	2	480	2	380	1	290	1
Five years or more	1,190	4	900	3	860	3	460	2

Source:
1990–91 and subsequent years: Hospital Episode Statistics.

Anabolic Steroids

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of fatalities caused by the use of anabolic steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs in each year since 1979. [19314]

Mr. Bowis: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mental Health Information

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what form the quarterly monitoring of mental health information by the NHS executive will take. [19821]

Mr. Bowis: In 1996–97, the Department will continue to monitor levels of hospital and community activity for the mentally ill. In the coming year, this is to be complimented by monitoring indicators related to specific aspects of policy including care planning; readmission rates; mentally disordered offenders; and supervised discharge.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the 68 health authorities whose plans anticipate the development of comprehensive mental health services before the end of 1996–97 will have 24-hour nursed care in the community available for those residents who need it within that time scale. [19819]

Mr. Bowis: The regional offices of the national health service executive will be closely monitoring the progress of all health authorities towards developing the full spectrum of care required for a comprehensive mental health service.

Section 64 Grants

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to which organisations *(a)* in and *(b)* outside London grants will be paid from 1 April under the section 64 grant scheme; and of these which have not previously received such grants. [20358]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Eccles (Ms Lestor) on 5 March, column *185*.

Edgware General Hospital

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to complete his reappraisal of the planned closure of Edgware general hospital accident and emergency department. [18597]

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not undertaking a re-appraisal of the planned closure of Edgware hospitals accident and emergency department.

Accident and Emergency Services

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue further guidance to health authorities in respect of accident and emergency services. [18904]

Mr. Horam: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made to the House on 6 March, columns 356–68.

NHS (Medical Techniques)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that services in the health service are based on the latest medical techniques. [18978]

Mr. Horam: Scientific evidence should provide the foundation for the planning and provision of effective health care. The national health service research and development programme, which began in 1991, has made substantial progress in increasing the knowledge base about the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of NHS services. The health technology assessment part of the programme provides research-based evidence on the costs and effectiveness across a range of interventions performed throughout the NHS.

The next step is to bridge the gap between research-based knowledge and routine clinical practice. Improving the effectiveness of clinical services is one of the medium-term priorities in the planning and priorities guidance for the NHS. On 10 January, the NHS executive published promoting clinical effectiveness, it sets out the resources available to health authorities, NHS trusts and clinicians responsible for developing strategies for clinical effectiveness and suggests ways in which resources may be put to best use. Copies of the booklet are available in the Library.

Working Children

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued on minimum wages, health and safety and number of hours worked, for working children; how this guidance is distributed; and what budget is available for any enforcement of minimum standards. [19370]

Mr. Bowis: No guidance has been issued on minimum wages. The restrictions on children's working hours are set in primary legislation and in local byelaws. All byelaws comply with guidance issued by the Department of Health to local authorities. Their enforcement is a matter for local authorities, and it is for them to devote to it the resources they deem necessary. Enforcement of health and safety legislation is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *293*, what assessment he has made of the effects on patient care in south Manchester of the closure of four intensive care beds; and if he will make a statement. [20366]

Mr. Horam: Availability of services is the responsibility of district health authorities and discussions are continuing between Manchester health commission and South Manchester University Hospitals national health service trust to plan service provision for 1996–97.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent further representations his Department has had from, or on behalf of, people with haemophilia who, in the course of NHS treatment were infected with hepatitis C; what plans he has to compensate them or in cases where the patient has died from infection, their dependents; and if he will make a statement. [20367]

Mr. Horam: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on 5 December 1995, columns *130-31*, since when, Ministers have received 34 further letters about payments to people who have developed hepatitis C through blood or blood products. Not all these letters were necessarily concerned solely or primarily with haemophiliacs.

As we have made clear in recent debates and in response to questions, the Government have great sympathy with those who may have been inadvertently infected with hepatitis C through national health service treatment, but as no fault or negligence on the part of the NHS has been proved, we have no plans to make special payments. Our view remains that the best way for the Government to help is to encourage research, and best treatment for those infected as well as supporting voluntary groups working with those infected. This we are already doing.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of deaths among people with haemophilia who in the course of NHS treatment were infected with hepatitis C at the latest date for which figures are available. [20368]

Mr. Horam: Figures for deaths of people with haemophilia infected with hepatitis C are not collected centrally by Government. I understand from the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre directors that the cause of death of 14 out of the 159 haemophilia patients known to have died in 1994, was shown as liver disease, of which hepatitis C may have been the cause.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20480]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Primary Care-led NHS

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to develop a primary care-led NHS. [18390]

Mr. Malone: General practitioner fundholders have already demonstrated the benefits to patients of a primary care-led national health service. The new health authorities will be responsible for working with GPs and their teams to improve services across the range of primary and secondary care. The listening programme, on which we are currently engaged, will build on these strengths.

HIV/AIDS

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) he will seek an apology from the European Commissioner responsible for the decision to allocate funds to enable CSV Media to send condoms on St. Valentine's day to Members of Parliament throughout the European Union; [20507]

(2) if he will make it his policy to require the European Commission AIDS unit to promote sexual abstinence before marriage and fidelity within it, and the avoidance of injected drugs, as the most effective means of avoiding the contracting of AIDS; and if he will make a statement. [20508]

Mr. Horam: We believe that, like other public bodies, it is important that the European Commission AIDS unit communicates the means of avoiding HIV transmission in a manner which is scientifically accurate and respects the personal and cultural sensitivities of the target audience. I share entirely the hon. Member's concern that the St. Valentine's day initiative was inappropriate and will ensure that this view is made known to the organisations involved.

Heroin Addicts

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of heroin addicts registered, in each of the last five years by district health authority, family health services authority, regional health authority and nationally. [19232]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 6 March 1996]:* The information available centrally by district, regions and nationally will be placed in the Library. Information by family health services authority is not available.

Human Embryos

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the probability of an ectopic pregnancy being created in a treatment cycle using *(a)* frozen embryos and *(b)* fresh embryos. [19789]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* As recorded in the records of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the latest available data are from 1993. This suggests that the risk of an ectopic pregnancy following fresh embryo transfer is seven per 1,000 patients; the risk following frozen embryo transfers five per 1,000 patients.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Agency Computer Systems

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many employees have been *(a)* dismissed and *(b)* faced other disciplinary action for unauthorised access to agency computer systems in (i) the Benefits Agency, (ii) the Child Support Agency, (iii) the Contributions Agency, (iv) the Information Technology Services Agency, (v) the Resettlement Agency and (vi) the War Pensions Agency since 1993. [19504]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

Employees dismissed and disciplined for unauthorised access to computer systems in DSS agencies since 1993

	Dismissals	*Other disciplinary action*
Benefits Agency	10	110[1]
Child Support Agency	3	11
Contributions Agency	5	11
Information Technology Services Agency	0	1
Resettlement Agency	0	0
War Pensions Agency	2	0
Total	20	133

[1] With approximately 70,000 staff, the Benefits Agency is by far the largest of the DSS Agencies. As the vast majority of their staff have access to computer systems, there is a proportionately higher number of incidents.

Agencies (Confidential Information)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many employees of *(a)* the Information Technology Services Agency, *(b)* the Resettlement Agency and *(c)* the War Pensions Agency have faced (i) dismissal and (ii) other disciplinary action for the improper use of confidential information since 1993. [19505]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table:

Action against staff for improper use of confidential information since 1993

	Dismissals	*Other disciplinary action*
Information Technology Services Agency	0	2
Resettlement Agency	0	0
War Pensions Agency	0	0
Total	0	2

Funeral Expenses

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average payment made to claimants under the discretionary social fund for funeral expenses since June 1995. [19882]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Average size of awards (£) (excluding Northern Ireland)

Award type	*Flowers/ wreath*	*Funeral expenses*	*Other*	*Average payment*
Community care grant	50.00	62.80	100.00	70.93
Budgeting loan	37.15	345.14	71.27	141.44
Crisis loan	57.33	217.21	—	121.28
Sub-total loans	40.94	316.71	71.27	137.56
Total	41.47	291.32	85.64	130.67

1. The information covers awards in the period between 5 June and 1 August 1995. It includes help with flowers/wreaths, funeral directors fees and other expenses.

2. Funeral expenses covered by the regulated scheme were specifically excluded from the discretionary Fund from 2 August 1995.

National Insurance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* for each year since 1979 and *(b)* for the whole period since 1979 the extra revenue raised by changing the rate of employee national insurance contributions. [20241]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Year	*Employee National Insurance Rates*[1] *(Percentage)*	*Estimated change in contribution revenue*[2] *(£ million)*
1979–80	6.5	—
1980–81	6.75	[3]+225
1981–82	7.75	[3]+1,020
1982–83	8.75	[3]+1,096
1983–84	9.0	[3]+285
1984–85	9.0	—

Year	Employee National Insurance Rates[1] (Percentage)	Estimated change in contribution revenue[2] (£ million)
1985–86	9.0	[4]–100
	7.0	
	5.0 from October	
1986–87	9.0	—
	7.0	
	5.0	
1987–88	9.0	—
	7.0	
	5.0	
1988–89	9.0	—
	7.0	
	5.0	
1989–90	9.0	[5]–1,000
	7.0	
	5.0	
	from October	
	2.0	
	9.0	
1990-91	2.0	—
	9.0	
1991–92	2.0	—
	9.0	
1992–93	2.0	—
	9.0	
1993–94	2.0	—
	9.0	
1994–95	2.0	[3]+1,914
	10.0	
1995–96	2.0	—
	10.0	

[1] Not contracted-out rates shown.

[2] Figures show the change in revenue for the tax year in which the change in contribution rate was made.

[3] Estimates taken form Government Actuary reports on the various Contributions Re-rating Orders and Social Security (Contributions) Bills which introduced the changes in contribution rates.

[4] Reduced rates for employees were introduced form October 1985. Estimate taken from the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1985–86 and relates to part year only.

[5] Revised structure applied from October 1989. Estimate given in the Official Report, 24 April 1989 Col. 670 and relates to part year only.

[6] If the employees' contribution structure, rates and level of contracted-out rebates in force in 1979–80 had applied in 1995–96, employees would have paid about £5.3 billion less in National Insurance contributions for that year.

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report,* column *147,* what account was taken of the impact on businesses in deciding not to make a compliance cost assessment for the Occupational Pension Schemes (Equal Treatment) Regulations. [18383]

Mr. Heald: The Occupational Pension Schemes (Equal Treatment) Regulations 1995 are concerned with the detailed application of existing equal treatment requirements which derive from article 119 of the treaty of Rome and were incorporated into domestic legislation by sections 62 to 66 of the Pensions Act 1995. The compliance cost assessment produced in April 1995 with the then Pensions Bill, explained that article 119 had direct effect in member states and any impact on industry arose directly from it. The impact of article 119 and clarificatory rulings was therefore excluded from that CCA.

However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) explained during the passage of the Bill, the European Court of Justice ruled that member states of the European Community may subject claims to equal treatment in occupational pensions to a domestic time limit. The Equal Treatment Regulations have the effect of applying the time limits for claims under the Equal Pay Act 1970 to claims for equal treatment in occupational pensions schemes. This means that claims must be brought within six months of leaving the relevant employment. Successful claims for retrospective access to pension schemes are limited to a maximum two-year period for any backdated award.

Rulings of the ECJ have also recognised certain exceptions from the equal treatments requirements. Accordingly, the regulations also make detailed provision as to the circumstances in which these exceptions may be relied upon. These provisions have significantly reduced the financial and administrative effect of the ECJ rulings on pension schemes and employers.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20092]

Mr. Burt: The advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by this Department are listed in "Public Bodies 1995", with the exception of the National Disability Council which was created in January 1996, and all have a statutory basis; further information is in the table:

(i) Under a Statutory Requirement	(ii) Voluntarily
(a) None	The advice given to the Secretary of State by the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board is published in its annual report.
(b) The National Disability Council	The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board.
(c) The National Disability Council	None.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20109]

Mr. Burt: The information is as follows:

(a) None.

(b) The Social Security Advisory Committee.

The Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board also frequently consults with medical experts and outside organisations representing disabled people.

All consultations are on a voluntary basis.

(c) The Social Security Advisory Committee, on a voluntary basis.

The National Disability Council has a statutory duty to publish its proposals for a Code of Practice which may include consultation with outside commercial interests.

(d) None.

(e) None.

(f) None.

Access Committee for England

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to make a statement on his review of the role and funding of the Access Committee for England. [20360]

Mr. Burt: I am considering, with colleagues, the detailed issues involved and we hope to announce our decision in the near future.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20485]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. The Department of Social Security, in accordance with Treasury guidelines, pays its invoices within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice. A recent sample showed a 96 per cent. level of compliance with this guideline.

To provide the information requested would involve further investigation and could be retrieved only at disproportionate cost.

Earnings Top-up Pilot Scheme

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to commission independent research into the earnings top-up pilot scheme. [20608]

Mr. Burt: I have today awarded contracts to three research organisations—the Policy Studies Institute, the Institute for Employment Research and the Centre for Research in Social Policy. Over the next three years, these institutes will undertake a detailed programme of research to evaluate the effectiveness of the earnings top-up pilot.

Earnings top-up is a new step in the Government's programme to strengthen incentives to work. The challenge is to discover whether topping up wages for workers without dependent children helps them to get jobs and stay in work. Family credit tackles this issue already for families with children, helping over 600,000 families.

The research programme lasts three years. It starts this year—before earnings top-up is introduced—to set a baseline against which progress can be measured. It then continues the investigation in succeeding years to assess the impact of earnings top-up, comparing the pilot areas to the four control areas.

The Policy Studies Institute will survey over 30,000 employers, workers and unemployed people, to look at the changing circumstances of people including movement into or out of work, and the wages they receive.

The Institute of Employment Research will look at how earnings top-up affects local labour markets, that is, at changes in the rates of employment, unemployment, and any effect on local wage levels.

The Centre for Research in Social Policy will carry out more in-depth interviews with people receiving earnings top-up, those in low-paid work not receiving it, and employers. This will build up a detailed picture of reactions and attitudes to the pilot benefit.

This £3 million research project is the largest the Department of Social Security has ever undertaken but it represents excellent value for money. To extend earnings top-up immediately to all low-paid people without dependent children would be a large investment, of the order of £500 million. We are taking the prudent course of testing its effectiveness first on a smaller scale.

At the end of the three years, we expect to have the information we need to decide whether earnings top-up is of value in helping people to move into work and to avoid unemployment.

I shall, in due course, be placing further details of the research programme in the Library.

Pensioner Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide an updated analysis for each quintile of pensioner incomes for single pensioners, pensioner couples and all pensioner units on the same basis as that given on 7 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns 196–200, table 1. [18220]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables.

When comparing this reply to the information given on 7 February 1995 it should be noted that the "single" and "couple" table headings for the numbers of pensioner units in each quintile were transposed in the previous reply.

Table 1: The Average Incomes of Pensioners 1979–1993 (by quintile–quintile 1=lowest)—(£ per week July 1993 prices)

(a) Single pensioners

Income source	*Quintile 1*		*Quintile 2*		*Quintile 3*		*Quintile 4*		*Quintile 5*		*Total*	
	1979	*1993*	*1979*	*1993*	*1979*	*1993*	*1979*	*1993*	*1979*	*1993*	*1979*	*1993*
Earnings[1]	0.40	0.00	0.10	0.10	0.40	0.30	3.80	2.10	25.40	24.50	6.00	5.40
Benefit income	51.70	60.80	60.10	73.10	63.00	84.70	62.50	83.20	56.70	84.80	58.80	77.30
Investment	2.10	4.10	2.20	5.10	2.40	4.90	7.00	13.30	33.40	69.10	9.40	19.30
Occupational	0.60	2.40	1.90	6.90	3.40	9.40	8.00	23.70	37.60	87.40	10.30	26.00
Other[1]	0.50	0.30	0.20	0.50	0.30	0.20	1.00	0.70	1.00	0.40	0.60	0.40
Gross income	55.30	67.60	64.40	85.70	69.40	99.60	82.40	123.10	154.10	266.10	85.00	128.40
Deductions	5.70	7.10	4.70	6.90	4.40	7.30	7.40	11.50	29.90	50.10	10.40	16.60

Table 1: The Average Incomes of Pensioners 1979–1993 (by quintile–quintile 1=lowest)—(£ per week July 1993 prices)

(a) Single pensioners

Income source	Quintile 1		Quintile 2		Quintile 3		Quintile 4		Quintile 5		Total	
	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993
Net income BHC (mean)	49.60	60.50	59.70	78.80	65.00	92.20	75.00	111.60	124.10	216.00	74.60	111.80
Net income AHC (mean)	39.20	44.90	48.70	59.90	52.80	68.60	61.30	95.30	110.10	202.90	62.40	94.30
Net income BHC (median)	51.20	63.10	61.00	80.70	67.70	93.10	75.40	110.00	107.60	172.60	67.70	93.10
Net income AHC (median)	41.30	49.80	48.70	59.70	53.60	67.40	61.70	94.50	95.40	160.90	53.60	67.40

[1] Indicates that sample sizes are too small to provide reliable estimates. Figures are shown only to demonstrate how totals are arrived at. All figures before housing costs (BHC) unless otherwise stated. After housing costs = AHC.

1. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated.
2. Components may not sum to totals owing to rounding.
3. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age (SPA) and couples in which the husband, or head, is over SPA.
4. Estimates of percentage growth are based on unrounded income figures and may not therefore be the same as those calculated from the rounded amounts in the table.
5. Estimates of growth in total net incomes by quintile are based on medians. Estimates of growth of components of income and total incomes of all pensioners are based on means.
6. Estimates are based on the Family Expenditure Surveys.

(b) Pensioner couples

Income source	Quintile 1		Quintile 2		Quintile 3		Quintile 4		Quintile 5		Total	
	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993
Earnings[1]	0.30	1.50	1.30	0.90	6.00	7.50	28.40	16.50	96.80	55.40	26.50	16.30
Benefit income	86.60	97.10	94.40	116.50	94.20	119.00	89.30	118.80	79.80	110.20	88.90	112.30
Investment	2.80	5.80	3.70	7.90	5.90	20.20	10.80	30.10	65.60	139.90	17.70	40.70
Occupational	2.70	8.40	7.40	20.70	19.40	36.80	38.90	83.40	97.60	197.70	33.10	69.30
Other[1]	0.30	0.20	0.40	0.30	1.70	0.70	0.90	1.20	1.10	1.20	0.90	0.70
Gross income	92.60	112.90	107.30	146.20	127.20	184.30	168.20	250.00	341.00	504.50	167.00	239.40
Deduction	6.20	10.30	5.70	11.10	8.50	14.60	18.60	25.40	81.90	88.50	24.10	29.90
Net income BHC (mean)	86.40	102.60	101.50	135.20	118.70	169.60	149.60	224.60	259.10	416.00	142.90	209.40
Net income AHC (mean)	72.60	84.40	85.50	116.60	102.90	154.90	132.60	214.30	235.10	401.50	125.60	194.20
Net income BHC (median)	86.60	105.60	100.60	134.40	116.70	169.90	147.50	220.20	224.10	366.80	116.70	169.00
Net income AHC (median)	72.90	92.10	84.60	115.80	100.60	155.50	131.60	209.60	203.50	349.90	100.60	155.50

[1] Indicates that sample sizes are too small to provide reliable estimates. Figures are shown only to demonstrate how totals are arrived at. All figures before housing costs (BHC) unless otherwise stated. After housing costs = AHC.

Notes:

1. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated.
2. Components may not sum to totals owing to rounding.
3. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age (SPA) and couples in which the husband, or head, is over SPA.
4. Estimates of percentage growth are based on unrounded income figures and may not therefore be the same as those calculated from the rounded amounts in the table.
5. Estimates of growth in total net incomes by quintile are based on medians. Estimates of growth of components of income and total incomes of all pensioners are based on means.
6. Estimates are based on the Family Expenditure Surveys.

(c) All pensioner units

Income source	Quintile 1		Quintile 2		Quintile 3		Quintile 4		Quintile 5		Total	
	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993	1979	1993
Earnings[1]	0.30	0.30	0.50	0.70	0.90	2.40	10.70	6.20	52.90	38.00	13.10	9.50
Benefit income	63.60	73.40	72.30	88.50	70.40	93.80	71.20	100.00	68.40	96.90	69.20	90.50
Investment	2.30	4.50	2.80	5.90	3.10	8.10	8.60	20.90	44.70	97.40	12.30	27.40
Occupational	1.30	4.50	3.90	11.30	6.50	15.70	17.50	46.00	61.70	133.90	18.20	42.30
Other[1]	0.40	0.30	0.20	0.40	0.50	0.30	1.40	0.90	0.90	0.80	0.70	0.50
Gross income	67.90	83.00	79.80	106.70	81.30	120.40	109.40	173.90	228.50	367.00	113.40	170.20
Deductions	5.90	8.20	5.10	8.40	5.30	8.80	10.30	16.90	49.20	65.80	15.10	21.60
Net income BHC (mean)	62.00	74.80	74.70	98.40	76.10	111.60	99.10	157.00	179.30	301.20	98.20	148.50
Net income AHC (mean)	54.20	60.20	59.50	71.00	63.70	98.70	85.40	144.10	158.30	285.90	84.20	131.90
Net income BHC (median)	54.40	67.30	63.40	86.10	69.40	98.50	86.30	142.40	165.30	262.40	69.40	98.50
Net income AHC (median)	44.60	54.00	49.30	61.70	54.50	81.60	69.30	126.00	145.20	250.40	54.50	81.60

[1] Indicates that sample sizes are too small to provide reliable estimates. Figures are shown only to demonstrate how totals are arrived at. All figures before housing costs (BHC) unless otherwise stated. After housing costs = AHC.

1. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated.
2. Components may not sum to totals owing to rounding.
3. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age (SPA) and couples in which the husband, or head, is over SPA.
4. Estimates of percentage growth are based on unrounded income figures and may not therefore be the same as those calculated from the rounded amounts in the table.
5. Estimates of growth in total net incomes by quintile are based on medians. Estimates of growth of components of income and total incomes of all pensioners are based on means.
6. Estimates are based on the Family Expenditure Surveys.

Average income change (per cent.)—Single Pensioners (S), Pensioner Couples (C) and Pensioner Units (U)

(b) Growth in Pensioner Income 1979–1993

	Quintile 1			Quintile 2			Quintile 3		
	S	*C*	*U*	*S*	*C*	*U*	*S*	*C*	*U*
Earnings[1]	–100	425	–12	–25	–32	22	–23	26	178
Benefit Income	18	12	15	22	23	22	35	26	33
Investment Income	98	109	100	135	111	111	102	243	162
Occupational Pension	270	215	245	264	180	190	180	90	142
Other[1]	–43	–30	–36	203	–37	56	–21	–59	–32
Gross Income	22	22	22	33	36	34	43	45	48
Deductions	24	66	39	47	93	63	65	72	68
Net Income BHC (median)	23	22	24	32	34	36	38	45	42
Net Income AHC (median)	21	26	21	22	37	25	26	54	50

Average income change (per cent.)—Single pensioners (S), Pensioner Couples (C) and Pensioner Units (U)

	Quintile 4			Quintile 5			Total		
	S	*C*	*U*	*S*	*C*	*U*	*S*	*C*	*U*
Earnings[1]	–44	–42	–42	–4	–43	–28	–10	–38	–27
Benefit income	33	33	40	50	38	42	32	26	31
Investment income	90	177	144	106	113	118	105	130	123
Occupational pension	195	115	163	133	103	117	152	109	133
Other[1]	–33	38	–39	–62	8	–11	–30	–18	–24
Gross income	49	49	59	73	48	61	51	43	50
Deductions	56	37	64	67	8	34	59	24	43
Net income BHC (median)	46	49	65	60	64	59	50 (mean)	47 (mean)	51 (mean)
Net income AHC (median)	53	59	82	69	72	72	51 (mean)	55 (mean)	57 (mean)

[1] Indicates that sample sizes are too small to provide reliable estimates. Figures are shown only to demonstrate how totals are arrived at. All figures before housing costs (BHC) unless otherwise stated. After housing costs=AHC.

1. All average amounts are means except where otherwise stated.
2. Components may not sum to totals owing to rounding.
3. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age (SPA) and couples in which the husband, or head, is over SPA.
4. Estimates of percentage growth are based on unrounded income figures and may not therefore be the same as those calculated from the rounded amounts in the table.
5. Estimates of growth in total net incomes by quintile are based on medians. Estimates of growth of components of income and total incomes of all pensioners are based on means.
6. Estimates are based on the Family Expenditure Surveys.

Table 2: The numbers of pensioner units in each quintile of the net equivalised income distribution for pensioners.

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q5*
(a) Pensioner couples					
Under 75	300,000[1]	350,000	350,000	400,000	400,000
75 and over	[1]250,000	[1]200,000	[1]150,000	[1]100,0001	[1]100,000
Total	550,000	550,000	550,000	550,000	550,000
(b) Single pensioners					
Under 75	400,000	500,000	400,000	450,000	500,000
75 and over	500,000	400,000	450,000	400,000	400,000
Total	900,000	900,000	900,000	900,000	900,000
(c) All pensioner units					
Under 75	700,000	800,000	750,000	900,000	950,000
75 and over	750,000	600,000	650,000	550,000	450,000
Total	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,400,000	1,400,000

[1] These estimates are based on unreliably small sample sizes, and therefore should be treated with caution.

1. Estimates have been rounded to the nearest 50,000. Figures may not sum to totals due to rounding.
2. These estimates are taken from the Family Expenditure Survey and are for private households in the UK.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 March 1996

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from his Department and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19034]

Mr. Hanley: The following items of equipment have been reported stolen or unaccounted for in the past five years:

Stolen	£
1991	
7 general items	865
1992	
4 general items	380
1993	
3 general items	
3 items of IT equipment	9,350
1994	
no general items	
22 items of IT equipment	45,177
These included:	
9 computers, 1 printer and miscellaneous hardware and software	[23,835]
4 Applemac computers	[5,180]
1 portable computer	[5,000]
4 IT items (laptop PCs, desktop PCs, printer)	[5,065]
1995	
no general items	
9 items of IT equipment	21,106
These included:	
8 IT items (Desktop PCs, laptop PC, monitor, printer)	[9,106]
computer chips	[10,000]
Unaccounted for:	
1994	
1 general item and 4 items of IT equipment	6,090
These included:	
4 laptop computers	[6,000]
Total	82,968

We are currently considering various devices available on the market to protect IT equipment.

Indonesia (Human Rights)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to raise the violation of human rights faced by independent human rights organisations in Indonesia at *(a)* the forthcoming 52nd session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and *(b)* other inter-governmental conferences. [18849]

Mr. Hanley: We have no plans to raise specific concerns of independent human rights organisations in Indonesia at the 52nd session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Together with our EU partners we will continue to raise with the Indonesian Government, bilaterally and at other appropriate international fora, our concerns about the human rights situation in Indonesia.

Commonwealth Scholarships

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the expenditure by the Government in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96 upon Commonwealth scholarships; and what estimate he has made of expenditure in 1996–97. [20046]

Mr. Hanley: The Government provided £63.5 million for awards for commonwealth students in 1994–95. Figures for 1995–96 are not yet available but are likely to be broadly similar.

The expenditure on awards for commonwealth students is likely to fall in 1996–97 due to reductions in the various budgets from which awards are funded, and policy changes affecting the pattern of training within the United Kingdom's bilateral country aid projects.

Zimbabwe (Press Freedom)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make statement on press freedom in Zimbabwe. [20457]

Mr. Hanley: The constitution of Zimbabwe provides for freedom of expression subject to certain defined exceptions. Most of the media in Zimbabwe are effectively state-controlled but there are privately owned press titles which take an independent stance and can be critical of Government.

SCOTLAND

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to review the capping limits on the environmentally sensitive areas provision; and if he will make a statement; [19949]

(2) when he expects the review of the environmentally sensitive areas provision to be complete; and if he will make a statement. [19950]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Biennial reviews of payments ceilings and rates have now been completed for all 10 environmentally sensitive area schemes. Increased ceilings and rates were introduced for the Breadalbane and Loch Lomond schemes with effect from 21 December 1995. Substantial increases in ceilings of up to 175 per cent. for the remaining eight schemes were announced on 8 March, subject to approval by the European Commission and Parliament. These increases demonstrate

our commitment to the schemes and should ensure that farmers and crofters who opt to join can manage their land to achieve maximum conservation benefit.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to correct the underspend on the environmentally sensitive areas provision; and if he will make a statement. [19948]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The environmentally sensitive areas scheme is voluntary and while uptake to date has been lower than anticipated, it is steadily increasing. My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture and the Environment expects that it will continue to do so as farmers and crofters recognise the benefits of participation and take advantage of substantially increased payment ceilings which we have recently announced.

Stalking

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a criminal offence of stalking. [19691]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government have recently completed an examination of the anti-stalking laws passed in the United States, Australia and Canada and are currently considering whether specific legislation to address the problems of stalking could with benefit be introduced in the United Kingdom. In Scotland, the breadth of the common law charge of breach of the peace is such that virtually any conduct which might constitute stalking can already be prosecuted as breach of the peace.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with further education colleges on *(a)* provision of places in the colleges and *(b)* amalgamation of existing colleges; and if he will make a statement on the negotiations he has had with each college. [20079]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: None.

Electric Shock Equipment

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the Lord Advocate to make a decision on whether to bring charges in respect of allegations made in the "Dispatches" programme on the export of electric shock equipment. [20357]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand from my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate that Strathclyde police are currently investigating allegations concerning the export of electro-shock equipment. At the conclusion of the investigation, a report will be submitted to Crown Office for the consideration of Crown counsel.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19452]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department has not directly bought computer capacity from other Departments or the private sector since 1987 and has no current plans to do so.

TRANSPORT

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what provisions were made to protect the interests of Strathclyde passenger transport executive in rolling stock funded by them which was transferred to the ownership of Angel Train Company and Eversholt Leasing Company; and if he will make a statement. [19600]

(2) what provisions were made when the rolling stock companies were established to safeguard the interests of passenger transport executives in rolling stock which they had funded. [19599]

Mr. Watts: Constraints on the use of the passenger rolling stock, which had previously been put in place by the British Railways Board to protect the interests of the PTEs were transferred, as appropriate, to the three passenger rolling stock leasing companies—Roscos. The arrangements for Strathcylde funded passenger rolling stock was recently confirmed to Strathclyde regional council by officials in my Department.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it continues to be his policy that passenger transport executives are entitled to direct the use of rolling stock which they have funded. [19601]

Mr. Watts: I have no current plans to change the present arrangements.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps were taken to inform the European Commission of the state subsidy provided to the privatised rolling stock companies from the British Railway's Board's retention of the obligation to meet outstanding loan charges in respect of PTE-funded assets transferred to rosco ownership; and if he will make a statement. [19602]

Mr. Watts: A decision by the Government and the British Railways Board to repay a proportion of PTE capital grants, as a means of compensating the PTEs for the loss of the lower costs charged to them by British Rail prior to April 1994, does not confer any benefit on the three recently privatised passenger rolling stock leasing companies.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost to the British Railways Board in 1996–97 of meeting outstanding loan charges in respect of PTE-funded assets which were transferred to private ownership. [19598]

Mr. Watts: The current estimated cost to the British Railways Board of payments to be made to the PTEs under deeds of assumption for 1996–97, in respect of rolling stock acquired by BR as a result of PTE capital grants and subsequently transferred to private ownership, is £10.6 million.

Marine Accidents (Borga)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* interim report and *(b)* special bulletins he has received from the marine accident investigation branch on the grounding of the Borga; when they were received; and if he will place copies of them in the Library. [20556]

Mr. Norris: Neither an interim report nor a special bulletin was produced in the case of the Borga investigation.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *216-17*, when he expects the marine accident investigation branch to report on the grounding of the Borga. [20572]

Mr. Norris: The marine accident investigation branch report of the investigation into the grounding of the Borga on 28 October 1995 will be published as soon as the investigation is complete. Work is continuing in co-operation with the authorities in Norway, the flag state of the vessel.

Royal Train

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of the royal train and what value was attached to the asset. [20452]

Mr. Watts: I understand that in 1995 Railtrack valued the royal train at approximately £11 million for insurance purposes.

Aircraft Insurance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regulatory mechanism is in place in the United Kingdom for checking that aircraft flying into and out of the United Kingdom are insured. [20468]

Mr. Norris: Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2407/92 on licensing of air carriers requires an air carrier with an operating licence granted by the competent licensing authority to be insured to cover liability in case of accidents. The regulation applies to all states of the European economic area and is implemented in the United Kingdom by Statutory Instrument No. 2992 "The Licensing of Air Carriers Regulations 1992". The competent licensing authority in the United Kingdom is the Civil Aviation Authority.

Article 102 of the Air Navigation (No. 2) Order 1995 provides that aircraft registered in a state other than the United Kingdom or another European economic area state shall not operate into the United Kingdom without the permission of the Secretary of State. Permits are not issued to non-European economic area air carriers unless they have provided evidence of insurance.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases there have been in the last five years of airlines flying to or from the United Kingdom that are not insured. [20469]

Mr. Norris: None that the Department or the Civil Aviation Authority is aware of.

London Underground

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total Government grant to London Underground Ltd. in each year since 1991; and what was the total annual amount of Government grant spent on *(a)* the Northern line, City branch, *(b)* the Bakerloo line and *(c)* the east London line. [20328]

Mr. Norris: My Department gives grant to London Transport. The distribution of grant by LT between London Underground Ltd. and its other businesses is an operational matter for LT. LT's allocation of grant to London Underground from 1991–92 is shown in the table. Grant is not allocated on a line-by-line basis. These figures exclude grant for the construction of the Jubilee line extension.

Year	*Grant (£m outturn prices)*[1]
1991–92	296
1992–93	598
1993–94	511
1994–95	413
1995–96	377 (estimate)

[1] Figures supplied by London Transport.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of the European Passenger Services fleet of trains; and what value was attached to the asset. [20298]

Mr. Watts: Seven of EPS's 11 Eurostar train sets and the night service stock are leased. The breakdown from EPS's latest annual report and accounts show that on 31 March 1995 the rolling stock had a written down value on a historical cost basis after taking into account leasing obligations of £318 million. No other valuations have been undertaken by EPS or the Department.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of the maintenance depot in Manchester for regional Eurostar trains; and what value was attached to the asset. [20302]

Mr. Watts: EPS's latest annual report and accounts show that on 31 March 1995 the Manchester Longsight depot had a written down value on a historical cost basis of £5.9 million. No other valuations have been undertaken by EPS or the Department.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of the Eurostar maintenance depot at North Pole; and what value was attached to the asset. [20300]

Mr. Watts: The breakdown from EPS's latest annual report and accounts show that on 31 March 1995 the North Pole depot has a written down value on a historical cost basis of £77.5 million. No other valuations have been undertaken by EPS or the Department.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of Waterloo international station; and what value was attached to the asset. [20299]

Mr. Watts: The breakdown from EPS's latest annual report and accounts show that on 31 March 1995 the Waterloo international terminal had a written down value on a historical cost basis of £136 million. No other valuations have been undertaken by EPS or the Department.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of the new Ashford international station; and what value was attached to the asset. [20301]

Mr. Watts: Ashford international station is carried in EPS's 1994–95 annual report and accounts as having a value of £41 million on 31 March 1995. This figure is based on the net present value of future leasing payments. No other valuations have been undertaken by EPS or the Department.

Orimulsion

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has carried out to check the safety aspects of transporting orimulsion. [19251]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 13 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about what studies have been carried out to check the transporting safety aspects of orimulsion.

The Marine Safety Agency (MSA) has not conducted research into this matter. I am aware, however, that the Marine Pollution Control Unit (MPCU), which is part of the Coastguard Agency, is conversant with studies carried out by other organisations and continues to monitor all orimulsion related research.

Milford Haven

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) on what occasions oil companies operating in Milford Haven or the harbour authority have suggested to his Department that aspects of the Sullom Voe system should be introduced at Milford Haven; and what was his response; [18578]

(2) if the Milford Haven port control staff are under standing instructions to monitor the harbour radar displays at all times during arrival and departure of tankers; [18583]

(3) if the port of Milford Haven has *(a)* permanent boom anchoring sites, *(b)* boom storage buildings and *(c)* boom layering boats; [18579]

(4) if the Milford Haven harbour radar is fitted with computer-tracking software and audible-visible alarms to warn port controllers when a ship deviates from the intended course; [18582]

(5) what is the reliability record of the Milford Haven harbour radar; and when it was last *(a)* overhauled, *(b)* upgraded and *(c)* replaced; [18586]

(6) if the Milford Haven harbour radar was working at the time of the grounding of the Sea Empress; [18599]

(7) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Milford Haven port safety requirements relative to those published in the Sullom Voe port handbook; [18600]

(8) if the Milford Haven harbour authority requires masters of incoming vessels to complete and sign a check-list of safety precautions certifying that their vessel meets all the port safety requirements; [18589]

(9) what is the specified maximum time allowed for tugs to reach a tanker in difficulties in *(a)* the approaches and *(b)* the entrance to Milford Haven harbour. [18577]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 13 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Milford Haven.

PQ 1311/95/96

I am not aware that any such suggestions have ever been received.

PQ 1310/95/96

No. The purpose of the radar system is to provide information rather than to enable direct control of vessels.

PQ 1293/95/96

The Port of Milford Haven has a number of permanent boom anchoring sites and two boon storage buildings. There are a number of boom laying boats within the Haven.

PQ 1292/95/96

Yes.

PQ 1289/95/96

The provision, operation and maintenance of the radar system is a matter for the Milford Haven Port Authority. They inform me that detailed reliability records are not readily available.

The radar is in effect continuously overhauled under a maintenance regime carried out by an electronics engineer permanently employed by the port authority, supported by the manufacturers.

In 1991 the whole system was fully examined and some of the data processing and display equipment was upgraded.

The system accepted by the authority from the manufacturers in 1986 is still in place.

PQ 1308/95/96

The radar at the signal station was working, but the St. Ann's Head radar station was not.

PQ 1300/95/96

Milford Haven Port Authority requires the masters of vessels carrying dangerous or polluting goods to complete the check list set out in Schedule 2 to Merchant Shipping Notice No. M1630 in accordance with the provisions of the Merchant Shipping (Reporting Requirements for Ships Carrying Dangerous or Polluting Goods) Regulations 1995 and provide that checklist to the pilot and the Port Authority.

PQ 1299/95/96

None, so far as I am aware. Our assessment of port oil pollution plans is made in relation to the National Contingency Plan.

PQ 1297/95/96

There is no specified maximum time. Three tugs are available on immediate notice at all times within the harbour. The estimated time for them to reach the entrance to the harbour is 30 minutes. The time taken to reach a vessel beyond the entrance would be greater, depending on its position. When a tanker is approaching the harbour three tugs (four for a large tanker) are ready to meet her at the bend in the channel, where they are within 15 minutes of the entrance.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how regularly liaison takes place between the Milford Haven harbour authority and oil terminal operators. [18590]

Mr. Norris: I understand that the Milford Haven Harbour Authority has daily contact with oil terminal operators.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many harbour tugs and of what specification were waiting at the entrance of Milford Haven to render immediate assistance in the event of vessels being in difficulties at the time of the Sea Empress disaster. [18580]

Mr. Norris: On the night of 15 February, four harbour tugs, each with a 45 tonne bollard pull, were on station within the Haven.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Milford Haven harbour authority *(a)* keeps records and *(b)* publishes details of all pollution incidents. [18588]

Mr. Norris: I understand that the Milford Haven Harbour Authority does keep records of pollution incidents, which are made available to the Advisory Committee on the Protection of the Sea on an annual basis for publication, as part of its report to the marine pollution control unit. The authority must also report individual pollution incidents to the marine pollution control unit.

Waste Oil Reception Facilities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the locations of United Kingdom waste reception facilities for waste oil from ships; [19631]

(2) if he will list the locations of United Kingdom waste reception facilities for waste oil from ships introduced since the Donaldson report; and if he will make a statement. [19629]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your questions about the locations of UK waste reception facilities for waste oil from ships, and those introduced since the Donaldson Report.

A list of the port waste reception facilities in the United Kingdom was placed in the House library in June 1995, based on a regular questionnaire survey of UK ports conducted by the Marine Safety Agency.

Information is not held in sufficient detail to enable port waste reception facilities which were introduced since the publication of Lord Donaldson's report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas" to be readily identified. However a questionnaire survey is to be carried out this year, the data collected will provide information on changes since 1995.

Railtrack (Asset Maintenance)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *145*, what was the total sum estimated by W. S. Atkins as required for maintenance of Railtrack's assets in steady state over 10 years; and what maintenance works are included in this estimate. [18548]

Mr. Watts: Railtrack's asset maintenance plan in respect of track and route structures, developed with the assistance of W. S. Atkins, is based on a central estimate for the 10 years from 1 April 1994 of £3,250 million. The forecast covers maintenance and renewals work on track embankments, cuttings, retaining walls, culverts and sea defences. It excludes day-to-day maintenance carried out under contract by the infrastructure maintenance companies.

Single-hulled Tankers

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what proposals he has to amend regulations governing admission of single-hulled oil tankers to harbours in the United Kingdom; [17894]

(2) what action he is taking to ensure that single-hull tankers are banned from using United Kingdom coastal waters; and if he will make a statement. [17913]

Mr. Norris: The Government participated fully in international agreements that single-hulled oil tankers would be phased out by 2024, as approximately 93 per cent. of the world's oil tanker fleet are single-hulled, a faster phasing out could restrict if not halt the essential movement of oil cargoes to and from our ports.

Sea Empress

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many hours the pilot on the Sea Empress had worked before the grounding. [18585]

Mr. Norris: The special bulletin issued by the marine accident investigation branch indicates that the pilot was adequately rested before starting duty.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all cases since 1987 where his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19455]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has one contract with a private sector company, Comshare Ltd., for the purchase of computer capacity. The value of the contract is commercially confidential.

The Law Officers' departments do not have any such contract with any other Department.

TREASURY

Financial Services Act

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Treasury's policy in respect of the statutory compliance duties of industry practitioners and regulators *(a)* to ensure that all breaches of section 47 of the Financial Services Act 1986 are identified, *(b)* to ensure that all identified breaches of section 47 are investigated and *(c)* to ensure that, following investigation, breaches of section 47 are prosecuted in the criminal courts. [19965]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury is responsible for the general policy expressed in the legislation, but not for prosecution of matters under section 47. The Financial

Services Act places no duties on industry practitioners and regulators of the kinds listed. In England and Wales, only the Secretary of State and the Director of Public Prosecutions have the power to prosecute or to consent to others prosecuting. In Northern Ireland, those powers are exercised by the Secretary of State and the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland. In Scotland, prosecutions would be brought by procurators fiscal.

Taxation

Mr. Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all rates of income tax in each year since 1976–77. [19812]

Mr. Jack: Table 1.10 of the 1995–96 "Tax Benefit Reference Manual" gives income tax rates for years 1976–77 to 1995–96, a copy of which can be found in the Library.

Proposed rates for 1996–97 are set as follows:

Taxable income £pa	*Tax rate for band (Percentage)*
Up to 3,900	20
3,900–25,500	24
Over 25,500	40

Armaments Employees

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the number of people employed in the United Kingdom *(a)* armaments and *(b)* armaments-related industries for each of the last 10 years. [19773]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Information available from the census of employment for 1984, 1987, 1989, 1991 and 1993 is provided in the following table. Some industrial activities previously classified to standard industrial classification 1980—SIC80—group "Aerospace equipment manufacture and repair" were re-classified to standard industrial classification 1992—SIC92—"Manufacture of weapons and ammunition". The dual figures for 1991 reflect this discontinuity.

Employees in Great Britain at September

Thousands[1]

Manufacture of ordnance, small arms; ammunition (SIC80 group 329)		*Manufacture of weapons; ammunition (SIC 92 group 29.6)*	
1984	19.4	—	—
1987	16.9	—	—
1989	16.7	1991	19.9
1991	13.5	1993	14.7

Source: CSO.
[1] Unadjusted.

Investment Incomes

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made, in the latest years for which information is available, of the number of taxpayers with taxable investment incomes of a *(a)* zero, *(b)* less than £100, *(c)* £101 to £499 and *(d)* over £500; and in each case what is the number of such taxpayers over the age of 65 years. [19495]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* Estimated numbers for 1996–97 based on projections from a mixture of statistical sources are given in the table. The estimates of the numbers with small amounts of investment income are very uncertain.

Range of taxable investment income in 1996–97 £	*Number of taxpayers Millions*	*of which taxpayers aged 65 or over Millions*
0	3.1	0.2
1–100	12.3	0.6
101–499	4.0	0.5
Over 500	6.4	1.7
Total	25.8	3.0

Pensioners' Income Bonds

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors led to the non-availability of application forms for pensioners' guaranteed income bonds (series 3) in post offices in Dewsbury during February. [20234]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* National savings sales booklets, which include application forms, for pensioners guaranteed income bonds are not related to any particular series, so could be used to purchase series 3 bonds as soon as they went on sale. I understand that Dewsbury post office had run out of stock and were awaiting new supplies. Stocks were available at the Post Office supplies depot and should have been delivered to Dewsbury post office within three weeks of being ordered.

I have written to the hon. lady in reply to her letter of 22 February with full details.

Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state, in current prices, the amount of debt written off by Her Majesty's Government in respect of each privatisation since 1979. [19603]

Mr. Jack: It is common practice for capital reconstruction to be undertaken where necessary before privatisation. For some privatisations debt is written off, for others debt is injected. Debts written off in respect of privatisations total some £22.5 billion, in current 1995–96 prices. Details are set out in the table. New debt totalling £13.94 billion at current prices was injected into privatised companies at the time of sale.

Debt Written off Prior to Privatisation

£ million

Year	*Company*	*Amount (cash)*	*Amount (1995–96 prices)*
1980–81	British Steel	509.3	1,105.2
1980–81	British Aerospace	60.0	130.2
1980–81	National Freight Corporation	100.0	217.0

Debt Written off Prior to Privatisation

£ million

Year	Company	Amount (cash)	Amount (1995–96 prices)
1980–81	British Airways	160.0	347.2
1982–83	British Transport Docks Board	81.3	150.2
1984–85	BT	2,789.9	4,689.9
1986–87	BAA	43.5	67.3
1988–89	British Steel	3,980.0	5,478.5
1989–90	Harland & Wolff	422.5	543.6
1989–90	Short Brothers	390.0	501.8
1989–90	Water companies	5,028.3	6,469.6
1991–92	Scottish Electricity Companies	1,043.6	1,170.0
1994–95	British Coal	1,633.4	1,678.3
Total		16,241.8	22,548.8

Departmental Reports

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the 1996 departmental reports to be published. [20891]

Mr. Waldegrave: Proposed publication dates for the 1996 departmental reports are as follows:

	Date
Public Expenditure: Statistical Analyses	Friday 15 March
HM Treasury; Chancellor of the Exchequer's smaller departments; Net Payments to EC Institutions	Monday 18 March
Lord Chancellor's and Law Officers' Departments	Tuesday 19 March
Ministry of Defence	Wednesday 20 March
Department of the Environment	Wednesday 20 March
Home Office (including Charity Commission)	Wednesday 20 March
Department of Health	Wednesday 20 March
Department of Social Security	Wednesday 20 March
Cabinet Office; Privy Council; Parliament	Wednesday 20 March
Customs and Excise	Wednesday 20 March
Department for Education and Employment	Thursday 21 March
Scottish Office (including Forestry Commission)	Friday 22 March
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (including the Overseas Development Administration)	Monday 25 March
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (including Intervention Board)	Monday 25 March
Department of Trade and Industry	Monday 25 March
Department of Transport	Monday 25 March
Department of National Heritage	Monday 25 March
Welsh Office	Monday 25 March
Northern Ireland Office	Monday 25 March
Inland Revenue	Monday 25 March

Copies will be made available at the Vote Office.

ENVIRONMENT

Orimulsion

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies his Department has carried out on the possible environmental impact of a major orimulsion spillage on land or sea. [19250]

Mr. Clappison: In 1992 a research study was carried out on behalf of the Department of the Environment which reviewed the impacts of orimulsion and the pollution abatements technologies which may be applied to orimulsion-fired boilers.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has not commissioned any research on the polluting effects of orimulsion.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Environmental Agency have evaluated regarding the environmental consequences of (i) the leak or spillage of orimulsion into seas or rivers and (ii) the operation of wind and rain on the gas generated by orimulsion. [19647]

Mr. Clappison: In 1992 a research study was carried out on behalf of the Department of the Environment which reviewed the impacts of orimulsion and the pollution abatements technologies which may be applied to orimulsion-fired boilers.

The Environment Agency does not come into being until 1 April. However, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution which will form part of the agency has evaluated reports from National Power regarding the possible effects of the gases released after abatement from the proposed burning of orimulsion at Pembroke power station. These reports are available on the public registers. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is also carrying out its own modelling into the dispersion of the potential releases from the plant. In addition Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is evaluating reports from Milford Haven Port Authority, which outlines the likely effects of a spillage of orimulsion into the Haven of up to 1,000 tonnes.

Recreation Grounds

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he plans to take to ensure that recreation grounds meet basic standards of health and safety. [19951]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 applies to recreation grounds where there is employment. Risks at recreation grounds are generally low, and inspection levels reflect this. Health and safety inspectors respond to any serious incident and follow up complaints. Sports grounds are regulated under the Safety at Sports Grounds Act 1975 on which there is guidance from the Department of National Heritage. DNH has also published guidance on playground safety.

Air Quality

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase the use of mobile units in measuring air quality. [20257]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has no plans to increase the use of mobile units. Mobile laboratories are generally used to monitor air quality for relatively short periods of time in a number of locations. Hence, data from mobile laboratories do not fit well into the national monitoring programmes operated by the Department, which requires long term monitoring to check for compliance with air quality standards and guidelines and to evaluate trends over a number of years.

Mobile laboratories are more appropriate for research, campaign or local investigation studies. For instance, in previous years, mobile laboratories were used by the Department to investigate the spatial and temporal distribution of chemically active pollutants such as ozone and nitrogen dioxide and, to investigate the distribution of nitrogen dioxide concentrations in local city areas, to assist in the selection of suitable long term monitoring sites.

Water Charges

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97 for each company and for England as a whole the price charged to domestic users for 1,000 gallons of water. [20219]

Mr. Clappison: This information is not available in the form requested. However, information about the price of water per cubic metre, for each company and for England and Wales as a whole, is given in Ofwat's "1994–95 Report on the cost of Water Delivered and Sewage Collected", published in November 1995. A copy of this report is in the Library. Information for 1995–96 and 1996–97 is not yet available.

Marine Nature Reserves

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policy changes he proposes to the granting of marine nature reserve status as a result of the Sea Empress disaster. [20015]

Mr. Clappison: There are no current plans to change the Government's policy on marine nature reserves.

Cement Kilns

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to give the Government's formal response to the Environment Committee's report into the burning of secondary liquid fuels in cement kilns (HC497 of Session 1994–95). [20463]

Mr. Clappison: The Government expect to publish this response in the next few weeks.

Education Authority Funding

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each education authority in England *(a)* the finalised education standard spending assessment figures and *(b)* the total standard spending assessment figures (i) by class and (ii) in total. [20498]

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* The information is given in the tables.

£ million

Local authority	*1996–97 Education SSA*	*1996–97 Total SSA*
Total all Education Authorities	17,764.242	33,966.153
Total Shire counties	9,624.824	16,599.170
Total Shire unitary authorities	966.241	1,966.881
Total Metropolitan districts	4,304.322	8,835.415
Total inner London boroughs including City	1,043.096	2,825.578
Total outer London boroughs	1,824.526	3,736.365
Total London boroughs	2,867.622	6,561.943
Isles of Scilly	1.233	2.744

£ million

Local authority	*1996–97 Education SSA*	*1996–97 Total SSA*
Greater London		
City of London	0.759	62.114
Camden	78.312	219.711
Greenwich	114.263	228.134
Hackney	92.084	249.171
Hammersmith and Fulham	56.047	165.298
Islington	81.095	214.883
Kensington and Chelsea	34.193	141.522
Lambeth	100.826	284.821
Lewisham	108.942	249.244
Southwark	109.297	268.959
Tower Hamlets	122.839	260.410
Wandsworth	86.304	240.000
Westminster	58.134	241.313
Barking and Dagenham	69.879	135.466
Barnet	117.029	234.575
Bexley	88.646	162.105
Brent	109.692	244.986
Bromley	103.845	203.516
Croydon	118.396	248.829
Ealing	112.151	248.079
Enfield	117.827	225.025
Haringey	93.427	224.371
Harrow	72.990	152.088
Havering	87.183	159.751
Hillingdon	93.797	185.587
Hounslow	94.807	185.688
Kingston upon Thames	47.066	98.179
Merton	58.096	128.897
Newham	130.381	270.332
Redbridge	98.258	185.768
Richmond upon Thames	45.854	106.011
Sutton	67.782	130.026
Waltham Forest	97.421	207.087

£ million

Local authority	*1996–97 Education SSA*	*1996–97 Total SSA*
Greater Manchester		
Bolton	100.891	197.677
Bury	61.635	120.120
Manchester	188.261	427.719
Oldham	94.759	180.485
Rochdale	82.736	160.877
Salford	82.496	184.742
Stockport	89.804	178.032
Tameside	80.591	159.497
Trafford	76.735	153.236
Wigan	110.133	211.009
Merseyside		
Knowsley	73.138	144.836
Liverpool	209.232	447.684
Sefton	106.847	218.085
St. Helens	66.604	138.007
Wirral	132.298	262.606
South Yorkshire		
Barnsley	76.867	159.161
Doncaster	119.680	228.558
Rotherham	102.425	195.977
Sheffield	170.970	396.245
Tyne and Wear		
Gateshead	70.844	158.062
Newcastle upon Tyne	99.652	230.302
North Tyneside	68.757	145.445
South Tyneside	59.030	125.454

£ million

Local authority	1996–97 Education SSA	1996–97 Total SSA
Sunderland	114.863	235.793
West Midlands		
Birmingham	448.721	920.128
Coventry	119.872	238.329
Dudley	104.158	209.519
Sandwell	118.096	242.208
Solihull	73.069	136.269
Walsall	108.588	214.808
Wolverhampton	99.898	203.641
West Yorkshire		
Bradford	209.868	412.548
Calderdale	77.167	148.459
Kirklees	141.523	280.286
Leeds	252.509	541.007
Wakefield	111.605	228.608

£ million

Local authority	1996–97 Education SSA	1996–97 Total SSA
Shire counties		
Bedfordshire	220.156	350.190
Berkshire	282.308	469.732
Buckinghamshire	252.855	408.220
Cambridgeshire	237.278	402.590
Cheshire	348.970	581.837
Cornwall	164.930	294.764
Cumbria	170.602	300.896
Derbyshire	319.922	554.985
Devon	345.862	627.857
Dorset	207.427	377.871
Durham	216.644	377.355
East Sussex	219.761	433.887
Essex	566.981	967.944
Gloucestershire	183.797	315.547
Hampshire	525.153	917.913
Hereford and Worcester	229.005	384.187
Hertfordshire	387.245	638.578
Kent	581.733	995.199
Lancashire	510.448	889.483
Leicestershire	333.840	559.174
Lincolnshire	213.026	367.724
Norfolk	243.384	439.546
North Yorkshire	185.854	328.377
Northamptonshire	222.270	365.121
Northumberland	113.513	200.600
Nottinghamshire	365.135	623.669
Oxfordshire	192.571	326.334
Shropshire	145.332	251.040
Somerset	150.908	273,578
Staffordshire	366.019	612.012
Suffolk	217.470	378.804
Surrey	307.474	564.958
Warwickshire	164.025	275.220
West Sussex	235.410	415.960
Wiltshire	197.517	327.959

£ million

Local authority	1996–97 education SSA	1996–97 total SSA
All purpose authorities		
Isles of Scilly	1.233	2.744
Isle of Wight Council	45.138	95.041
Bath and North East Somerset	54.404	109.142
Bristol	119.870	279.421
South Gloucestershire	78.677	144.734
North Somerset	58.642	118.274
Hartlepool	37.013	75.199
Middlesbrough	61.491	126.785
Redcar and Cleveland	59.590	114.987
Stockton on Tees	71.747	137.543
East Riding of Yorkshire	102.954	204.246
Kingston upon Hull	102.701	219.055
North East Lincolnshire	64.840	122.663
North Lincolnshire	56.381	110.035
York	52.793	109.756

Safety Signs

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken to implement EC directive 92/58 on safety signs for United Kingdom products. [18699]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 4 March 1996, *Official Report*, column 7, about the EC safety signs directive 92/95/EEC.

Coal Mining Accidents

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* serious reportable accidents per 100,000 manshifts in the deep coal mining industry between privatisation and 31 December 1995. [20199]

Sir Paul Beresford: The figures are not available for the period in question. However, provisional figures for the period from 1 April 1995 to 30 September 1995 give rates of 0.08 fatal accidents and 3.17 major injury accidents per 100,000 manshifts in coal mines.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the accident rates recorded in the first year of the privatised deep coal industry. [20200]

Sir Paul Beresford: None. Full information for the year is not yet available.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action the mines inspectorate is taking to ensure that the accident reporting regime in the privatised deep coal mining industry adequately records the nature and cause of accidents so that preventative measures can be taken. [20201]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 apply to coal mining companies as they do to all other employers. Their effect is to require the coal mining companies to notify the mines inspectorate of fatal accidents; major injuries; and injuries that incapacitate people from undertaking work which they might otherwise reasonably be expected to undertake for a period of more than three consecutive days; and certain specified dangerous occurrences. As part of its normal programme of inspection the mines inspectorate seeks to ensure that the companies are complying with the 1985 regulations. The 1985 regulations will be replaced with effect from 1 April 1996 by the new revised and updated

Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995. The new regulations will continue the core injury and dangerous occurrence reporting requirements.

Coal Mining (Safety Regime)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of the procedures set out in the Health and Safety Commission publication "Your Rights When Health and Safety Inspectors Take Action" on the safety regime in the deep coal mining industry; and if he will make a statement. [20202]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 8 March, *Official Report,* column *364.*

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of the publication "Your Rights When Health and Safety Inspectors Take Action" *(a)* on the issuing of improvement notices and *(b)* on the issuing of prohibition notices; and if he will make a statement. [20203]

Sir Paul Beresford: It is too early to say what effect, if any, the procedures in the leaflet will have on the issuing of improvement notices. The commission is monitoring how the procedures are working in practice and will report to me. The leaflet has no effect on the procedure for issuing prohibition notices: It spells out practice that has always been followed.

Anti-competitive Behaviour, Lincolnshire

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has yet considered the response by Lincolnshire county council to the notices served upon the authority on 11 April 1995 under section 19A of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980; and if he will make a statement. [20732]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend has considered carefully the responses which Lincolnshire county council has made to the two notices served on the authority for financial failure of the direct labour organisation in 1993–94 and for alleged anti-competitive behaviour. In relation to the notice for financial failure, he is satisfied that appropriate steps have been taken, and will not be taking any further action. He has however today given the authority a direction under section 19B of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 for anti-competitive behaviour.

After careful consideration, the Secretary of State remains of the opinion that the authority acted in an anti-competitive manner in awarding a contract for highways maintenance work worth £20,635,000 to its in-house direct labour organisation when it was not the lowest tenderer. He considers that the authority's concerns about the contractor's ability to do the work and financial status were not backed up by sufficient evidence, and therefore were not reasonable grounds for rejection of the lower bid which offered a saving of £2,240,000.

The direction given to Lincolnshire county council requires the authority to retender the work so that new arrangements are in place by 1 January 1997. The authority will need to obtain the Secretary of State's permission if it is intended to award the work in-house, to consult the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors and the Association of Consulting Engineers on matters contained in the specifications and the methods of tender evaluation to be used; and to seek the comments of the Association of Consulting Engineers regularly throughout the tendering process.

Environment Agency

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decision he has made concerning the membership schemes proposed by the Environment Agency for its regional environment protection advisory committees. [20893]

Mr. Clappison: The consultation period on the membership schemes has now closed. After careful consideration of the responses received my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has approved the schemes in the form in which they were submitted by the agency. The agency will now be consulting on nominations for each committee.

Development Plans

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the system of development plans prepared under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990; and if he will make a statement. [21092]

Mr. Gummer: The plan-led system requires each district planning authority to have an area-wide local plan or unitary development plan. We set a target, agreed with local authorities, of getting a substantial majority of those plans prepared, debated and formally adopted by the end of 1996. The result of the most recent monitoring survey shows that 62 per cent. of authorities expect to have adopted their plan by the target date. This shortfall is disappointing.

I have been concerned at the length of time it is taking some authorities to adopt their plan. We consulted earlier about possible changes to speed up this process. The response was lukewarm about radical change, but supported change that could be achieved within the scope of existing legislation. Already the planning inspectorate has introduced more concise reports on local plan inquiries and a system of service agreements with local authorities on their likely length and cost.

I am proposing further changes that can be brought into effect quickly, with the publication of proposals to amend both the code of practice on development plans and the development plan regulations. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

In addition, I am not ruling out further changes, including measures that will require legislation, if these are wanted by the users of the development plan system. My Department will shortly be writing to interested organisations about this wider review.

HEALTH

Relocation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many, and which, health authorities and trusts operated negative equity buyout or similar relocation schemes prior to executive guidance being issued in October 1994; and how much was paid by each health service body under such schemes in each year. [19030]

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Consultant Ophthalmology

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant ophthalmology sessions are available on average each week at present; and how many were available on average each week in each of the past five years. [19611]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Supermarket (Sale of Drugs)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on community pharmacies of large supermarket chains selling *(a)* non-prescription and *(b)* prescription drugs below the recommended retail price. [19810]

Mr. Malone: *(a)* None. *(b)* prescription drugs are not available for sale.

Schizophrenia

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis the relative effectiveness of admission of patients with schizophrenia to *(a)* a district general hospital and *(b)* an area mental hospital is assessed; and over what period after discharge. [19824]

Mr. Bowis: We are working with the Royal College of Psychiatrists to develop outcome scales to assess the health and social functioning of mentally ill people.

Human Embryos

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is taken in respect of human embryos stored for more than five years, but less than the 39 years specified by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (Statutory Storage Period for Human Embryos) Regulations in the event that the woman for the relief of whose infertility they had been stored ceases to receive treatment. [19657]

Mr. Horam: Embryos will normally remain in store until used for treatment purposes or until the storage period agreed with the couple expires. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is preparing guidance for licensed centres on the steps that should be taken to review the situation with the couple concerned before the storage period ends.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of all forms of consent authorised by his Department for use by infertility and research clinics in connection with the creation, storage and use of human embryos. [19656]

Mr. Horam: Copies of consent forms issued by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority will be placed in the Library. These forms are not subject to authorisation by the Department of Health.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of all codes of practice issued by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in connection with the consent which is sought by the donors of gametes and human embryos, with specific reference to *(a)* maximum storage periods, *(b)* the individuals for the relief of whose infertility those embryos may be used and *(c)* the research or other non-therapeutic purposes for which those embryos may be used. [19655]

Mr. Horam: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's code of practice provides guidance to licensed centres about consent to storage of gametes and embryos, consent to use of gametes and embryos in treatment and consent for use of gametes and embryos in research. Copies of the code of practice are available in the Library.

HIV (Anti-viral Medicines)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, column *184*, what assessment he has made of the funding requirements of health authorities necessary to ensure that where combination therapies of antiviral medicines are determined by clinicians as being the best response to HIV for a particular patient, there will be no financial obstacle to their prescription. [19937]

Mr. Horam: The Department allocates specific funding in relation to treating people with HIV and AIDS. The AIDS treatment and care budget is no longer ringfenced, and health authorities have the flexibility to move funds into HIV/AIDS from their main allocations if they so wish. The AIDS treatment budget already allows for significant costs for drug therapies and we will be monitoring the uptake and impact of combination therapies.

Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evaluation he has made of the benefit of specialised computer equipment for blind and partially sighted people; [20236]

(2) what proposals he has to encourage the use of specialised computer equipment by blind and partially sighted people. [20239]

Mr. Bowis: The Department has not carried out such an evaluation. We have, however, made a grant of £25,000 per year for three years to the computability centre in Warwick. The centre is a national charity which provides information and advice on computers to disabled people, carers, employers and professionals.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of blind and partially sighted people in the United Kingdom are under the age of 18 years. [20238]

Mr. Bowis: Local authority registers show that at 31 March 1994 in England, around 2 per cent. of people registered as blind and 2.5 per cent. of those registered as partially sighted were aged under 18.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many blind and partially sighted people live in *(a)* Coventry, *(b)* the west midlands and *(c)* the United Kingdom. [20237]

Mr. Bowis: Information on the numbers of people registered with local authorities as blind or partially sighted is shown in the table. As registration of blindness with local authorities is voluntary the figures may not provide a wholly reliable indicator of the prevalence of blindness or partial sight in the population.

Blind and partially sighted people registered with local authorities—at 31 March 1994

Numbers

	Blind and partially sighted people	*Blind people*	*Partially sighted people*
Coventry	1,440	730	720
West Midlands	22,210	13,700	9,510
England	265,370	149,670	115,710

Source: DH triennial return SSDA902.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many blind and partially sighted people in the United Kingdom use specialised computer equipment for individual use otherwise than as students or as employees. [20235]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mentally Ill People

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the qualification of staff of residential accommodation for mentally ill people in *(a)* the community and *(b)* psychiatric hospitals. [19825]

Mr. Bowis: Registering authorities decide the level of qualification and suitability of staff in residential homes. Each trust determines the staff and skills that they need to deliver the service which they provide through their contracts.

GP Fundholding, North Essex

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population in the North Essex health authority area are now served by fundholding general practitioners. [18598]

Mr. Malone: A total of 47 per cent. of the population in North Essex health authority are currently registered with a fundholding practice. We expect this to rise to 60 per cent. this April.

Trust Directors (Insurance)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he has had with the chairmen of NHS trusts concerning insuring trust directors against liabilities other than in cases of malfeasance. [20555]

Mr. Malone: None. Guidance to the national health service on the personal liability of non-executive directors is in course of preparation. The decision as to whether insurance is appropriate will remain one for individual trust boards.

WALES

Housing Rents

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current average gross weekly rent *(a)* for council rented accommodation and *(b)* housing association rented accommodation in Wales; and what were the corresponding figures five years earlier. [17882]

Mr. Hague: The available information on average actual rents is as follows:

	1990–91 £	*1995–96* £
Rented from:		
Local authority	24.26	36.11
Housing Association[1]	n/a	42.31

[1] Comparable information is available only from 1994–95 and even then such overall average rents do not reflect the different sizes, ages and locations of dwellings in the local authority and housing association stocks.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19418]

Mr. Hague: Letters passed to my Department's next steps agency—CADW—are as follows:

Year	*Letters*	*Percentage of total*
1991	84	3
1992	21	1
1993	61	2
1994	90	3
1995	111	4

Questions passed to my Department's next steps agency—CADW—is as follows:

Year	*Number of questions*	*Percentage of total*
1991	3	less than 1
1992	4	less than 1
1993	1	less than 1
1994	1	less than 1
1995	3	less than 1

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all cases since 1987 in which his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19463]

Mr. Hague: The following is the information:

(a) Chessington Computer Centre

(b) SIAS Ltd (since November 1990)

De Montfort University (since March 1992)

The total value of the contracts listed above is £1,610,442.00

The precise amounts paid under each of these contracts are commercially confidential.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the way in which the Environmental Protection Act 1990, section 48(6) and (7) prevents local authorities from recycling the domestic and commercial waste they collect; and if he will make it his policy to allow local authorities to recycle as much of the waste they collect as is feasible. [19941]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about section 48(7). This subsection has not yet been brought into operation but its effects would be to prevent waste collection authorities in Wales from providing plant and equipment for the sorting and baling of waste themselves and would require them to engage independent contractors for this purpose. In making arrangements for recycling, district councils in Wales will be aware of the additional powers available to them under sections 51 and 55 of the 1990 Act.

In the recent White Paper "Making Waste Work", the Government made clear their intention to review the role of local authorities in recycling. We also reaffirmed our commitment to the target of recycling or composting 25 per cent. of all household waste by 2000.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has received from each of the counties and boroughs due to take responsibility for local government on 1 April of the amount of waste they will recycle in the first year of their existence. [19938]

Mr. Jones: None.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the numbers of his departmental staff in the *(a)* economic development, *(b)* industrial and training, *(c)* agriculture, *(d)* local government, *(e)* health, *(f)* health professional, *(g)* nursing, *(h)* social services inspectorate, *(i)* CADW, *(j)* education, *(k)* translation unit, *(l)* establishment, *(m)* finance, *(n)* legal and *(o)* private office division (i) in 1995–96 and (ii) under management proposals in 1996–97. [19662]

Mr. Hague: Details of staff numbers are to be published on 25 March in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1996–97 to 1998–99", Cmnd 3215.

Farmers Union

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has recently received from the Farmers Union of Wales; and if he will make a statement. [20076]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Representations on a variety of issues have recently been received.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has held concerning the implementation of the pre-school vouchers scheme in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [20231]

Mr. Hague: Discussions about the voucher scheme have been held by Ministers or officials with representatives of local authorities, school governors, parents and teachers, the voluntary sector, the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales and the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales.

Sand Extraction

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the report by Hydraulics Research of Wallingford on sand extraction off the south Wales coast at and around the Nash bank. [20262]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The report was commissioned by the Crown estate to assist the consideration of the current applications for dredging. The report is available for inspection at the Welsh Office. Full copies have been sent to the National Rivers Authority, the Countryside Council for Wales, Ogwr borough council, Mid Glamorgan county council and the Swansea Bay coastal cell group.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many forms the Agriculture Department has processed for the integrated administration and control system in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [20082]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office received 20,898 forms in 1994, and 20,005 in 1995.

General Medical Practitioners

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general medical practitioners there were in Wales in each of the last five years; and how many of these were unrestricted principals. [20253]

Mr. Hague: The information is given in the following table:

	General Medical Practitioners	
	Total[1]	*Unrestricted principals*
1 October 1991	1,808	1,647
1 October 1992	1,835	1,676
1 October 1993	1,850	1,702
1 October 1994	1,850	1,710
1 April 1995[2]	1,833	1,710

[1] Unrestricted principals, restricted principals, assistants and trainees.
[2] The latest date for which information is available.

Arable Aid

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many claims for arable aid his Department's Agriculture Departments divisional offices have processed in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [20169]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office paid out 2,243 claims in 1994, which included 85 claims from the 1993 scheme; and 2,719 in 1995, which included 408 from the 1994 scheme.

Welsh Tourist Board

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the maximum number of board members of the Welsh tourist board; what is his policy for filling vacancies which arise from time to time; for what periods during the past three years the Welsh tourist board has operated with less than a full complement of board members; and what plans he has for making further board appointments. [20232]

Mr. Hague: The maximum membership of the Wales tourist board is a chairman and not more than six other members. When filling vacancies I consider the best interests for Wales and select people on the basis of merit who through their abilities, experience and qualities match the needs of the public body in question. The board has operated effectively below its complement over the past two years; but I shall be bringing it up to full membership as soon as possible.

Agriculture Department

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total value of payments made by the Welsh Office agriculture department's divisional offices in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [20080]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A total of £198.4 million in 1994–95 and an estimated £231.5 million in 1995–96.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many divisional offices the agriculture department had in Wales in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [20081]

Mr. Hague: Three in 1991, 1993 and 1995.

A470, Gwynedd

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's future plans concerning the improvement of the A470 in Gwynedd. [20173]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Plans for major improvements on the A470 in Gwynedd in 1996–97 and future years will be included in the 1996 Welsh Office departmental report to be published on 25 March. In addition there are three schemes in the medium—under £3 million—programme for construction in the next three years. Further schemes are planned.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated budget for the Welsh development agency for 1996–97; how much funding was generated by

the sale of Welsh Development Agency capital assets in 1994–95; and how much is forecast to be so generated in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [20249]

Mr. Hague: The agency's budget for its 1996–97 base programme has been set at £120 million. This will be increased by £6.8 million following my decision to transfer responsibility for urban investment grant to the agency. The agency also expects to attract £10 million of European regional development fund receipts to support projects additional to its base programme. The sale of capital assets generated £72.4 million in 1994–95 and is forecast to yield £75.0 million in 1995–96 and £68.0 million in 1996–97 for re-investment in the Welsh economy.

NHS Trust Directors (Insurance)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of NHS trusts in Wales concerning insuring trust directors against liabilities other than in cases of malfeasance. [20558]

Mr. Hague: I have not formally consulted the NHS trust chairmen about this issue. Guidance on non-executive liability will be published in the near future.

Public Bodies

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to notify the economic development non-departmental public bodies in Wales of his strategic guidance for 1996–97. [20977]

Mr. Hague: I have today written to the chairmen of the Welsh development agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, Cardiff Bay development corporation, the Land Authority for Wales and the Wales tourist board to inform them of my strategic targets for 1996–97 and to set out my policy and operational priorities which should be taken into account in the preparation of corporate and operational plans. Copies of the letters have been placed in the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Eastwood Park Prison

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the size of the prison cells at Eastwood Park prison. [19332]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the size of prison cells at Eastwood Park Prison.

The sleeping accommodation at Eastwood Park prison is divided into 4 areas:

1. *Health Care Centre* which has cellular sleeping accommodation. The 10 medical cells are each 4.20m by 2.95m (12.39m_2).
2. *Segregation Unit* which has 2 cells which are each 2.425m by 3.01m (7.3^2).
3. *East* Block which has 37 redecorated sleeping accommodation single cubicles measuring 2.200m by 3.050m (6.7m^2).
4. *"Mid and West"* Blocks which each have 43 redecorated single cubicles with a room size measuring 1.593m by 2.630m (5.076m^2.

Prisoners (Non-Payment of Fines)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women served terms of imprisonment in the last three years for which records are available for non-payment of fines; how many sentences were for non-payment of television licence fines; what is the average term served for such non-payment; and what measures alternative to prison he is considering. [19877]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter Richard Tilt to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many (a) men and (b) women served terms of imprisonment in the last three years for which records are available for non-payment of fines; how many sentences were for non-payment for television licences; what is the average term served for such non-payment; and what measures alternative to prison he is considering.

Information on the number of fine defaulters received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for the years 1993 and 1994, analysed by offence group is published in "Prison statistics, England and Wales" (Tables 7.1 and 7.3 of the 1994 edition, Cm 3087), a copy of which is available in the Library. Estimates are given of time served in custody.

Provisional information for 1995 shows that 19,341 male and 1,401 female fine defaulters were received in to Prison Service establishments in England and Wales. Of these, 508 males and 241 females were received for defaulting on a fine after conviction for using a television without a licence. The average time served by fine defaulters is about one week.

Courts may not imprison a fine defaulter unless they have used or considered all other methods of enforcing the fine. These include deductions from benefit or attachment of earnings, or a money payments supervision order. They must also be satisfied that the failure to pay the fine is the result of wilful refusal or culpable neglect.

The Government has set up a Working Group including representatives from the Magistrates' Association and the Justices' Clerks' Society, to examine urgently what improvements can be made to the enforcement of fines and other financial penalties. The Working Group will issue best practice guidance to courts within the next few months which will detail improvements which can be implemented immediately by the courts. The Government will also consider whether more wide-ranging changes are needed, which may require legislation.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if hands of visitors visiting prisoners

in Doncaster prison since it opened have been dye-stamped; and if he will make a statement. [19743]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the dye-stamping of hands of visitors at Doncaster prison.

The prison opened on 20 June 1994 and the practice of dye-stamping visitors' hands with an ultra-violet reactive liquid began on 23 September 1994. This is one of a number of security procedures in place to ensure that people leaving the prison are genuine visitors rather than prisoners posing as such.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if there is a one year break in the contract for Doncaster prison; and if he will make a statement. [19632]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about a one-year break in the contract for Doncaster prison.

There is no one-year break clause in the Doncaster contract, but the Authority has the option to terminate the contract by giving six months' notice to the contractor.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since it opened he has had to make a decision on trans-sexuals in Doncaster prison; and if he will make a statement. [19642]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about transsexuals in Doncaster prison.

Since Doncaster prison opened on 20 June 1994, it has never knowingly received any transsexual prisoners into custody. No decisions have therefore had to be made about their treatment.

Police Car Chases

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police car chases have resulted in *(a)* death and *(b)* injury in each of the last five years; [20192]

(2) how many deaths as a result of police car chases have involved *(a)* bystanders, *(b)* police officers and *(c)* those being pursued in each of the last five years; [20191]

(3) how many deaths there have been involving police car chases in each police authority area in each of the last five years. [20186]

Mr. Maclean: Information in the precise form requested is not available centrally, but the available information is given for the years 1991–93 in the first table. The figures from 1994 to 31 March 1995 are given in the second table. In both cases, the information relates to incidents where death or serious injury has arisen in the course of either police pursuits or responses to emergency calls in England and Wales.

Table 1: 1991–1993 Fatal or serious injuries arising in the course of Police immediate responses or pursuits

Force name	*Police fatal injury*			*Police serious injury*			*Civilian fatal injury*			*Civilian serious injury*		
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Avon and Somerset	0	0	0	3	11	1	1	4	2	5	11	5
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	0	0	0	5	3
Cheshire	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	5	6	3
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	2	0
Cumbria	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Devon and Cornwall	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Dorset	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	4	2	3
Durham	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	0
Essex	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	6	2	0	0	1	1	1	0
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	1	2	4	3	3	1	15	4	41
Hampshire	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	7	0	2
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	3	3	5	0	0	1	5	4	2
Humberside	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	1	0	6
Kent	0	0	0	4	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	1	0	7	2	4
Leicestershire	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	12	2
Lincolnshire	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1
Merseyside	0	0	0	3	1	7	4	0	1	26	21	4
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	3
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	2	2
Northumbria	0	0	0	3	3	0	3	1	2	4	1	10
North Yorkshire	0	0	1	3	5	2	0	0	0	4	5	7

Table 1: 1991–1993 Fatal or serious injuries arising in the course of Police immediate responses or pursuits

Force name	Police fatal injury			Police serious injury			Civilian fatal injury			Civilian serious injury		
	1991	1992	1993	1991	1992	1993	1991	1992	1993	1991	1992	1993
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	3	3	0
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	4	1	6	1	1	0	9	10	4
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Surrey	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0
Sussex	0	0	0	2	2	3	0	0	1	5	5	6
Thames Valley	0	0	0	1	3	2	1	1	1	6	5	11
Warwickshire	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
West Mercia	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0
West Midlands	0	0	1	9	5	0	1	3	2	0	1	1
West Yorkshire	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Dyfed-Powys	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Gwent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
North Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
South Wales	0	0	0	5	7	3	0	1	1	0	12	2
Metropolitan Police	0	1	2	41	56	51	3	7	10	40	59	45
Total	2	2	5	101	112	113	30	28	29	170	188	187

Table 2: 1994 and up to 31 March 1995

Force name	Police fatal injury	Police serious injury	Civilian fatal injury	Civilian serious injury
Avon and Somerset	0	1	0	1
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	0	1	0	0
City of London	0	0	0	1
Cleveland	0	0	0	3
Cumbria	0	0	1	1
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	0	0	0	1
Dorset	0	2	0	2
Durham	0	0	0	1
Dyfed Powys	0	0	0	1
Essex	0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0
Greater Manchester	0	2	0	4
Gwent	0	0	0	0
Hampshire	0	0	0	0
Hertfordshire	0	3	0	0
Humberside	0	0	0	2
Kent	0	0	0	0
Lancashire	0	0	0	2
Leicestershire	0	1	0	1
Lincolnshire	0	1	0	0
Merseyside	0	6	1	4
Metropolitan Police	2	22	11	22
Norfolk	0	1	1	1
North Wales	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	1	0	1
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0
Northumbria	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	1	2	3
South Wales	0	0	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	1
Staffordshire	0	0	1	1
Suffolk	0	0	0	0
Surrey	0	2	0	1
Sussex	0	4	0	0
Thames Valley	0	3	0	0
Warwickshire	0	1	0	1
West Mercia	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	0	1	1	1
West Yorkshire	0	0	1	0
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0
Total	2	53	19	56

Mr. Mohammed Al Fayed

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from Mr. Mohammed Al Fayed concerning the Immigration and Asylum Bill; when he intends to respond; and if he will place the correspondence in the Library. [19805]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* Mr. Al Fayed wrote to me on 14 February suggesting that the Bill would restrict the rights and freedoms of immigrants irrespective of how long they had lived and worked here. I shall send a reply shortly explaining that such concerns are groundless. I will place a copy of the correspondence in the Library.

Immigration

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has *(a)* to review immigration rules and *(b)* to ensure that tabled amendments are moved to the Immigration and Asylum Bill to meet the criticisms made by Mr. Justice Judge; and if he will make a statement. [19806]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* I assume that the hon. Member is referring to recent observations made by Mr. Justice Judge when dismissing an application for judicial review of decisions made under the British Nationality Act 1981. We will consider the observations when the transcript is available. Nationality matters fall outside the scope of the immigration rules and of the Bill.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department has issued in respect of the consideration by his officials of cases of persons who are liable to be removed as illegal entrants or deported but who have married a person settled in the United Kingdom. [21110]

Mr. Howard: New guidance has been issued setting out the factors to be considered in cases involving the removal or deportation of people married to a person settled here. The guidance, a copy of which has been placed in the Library, will take immediate effect.

Prisons (Drugs Tests)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *184*, on mandatory drugs testing, if he will list how many added days were restored to prisoners appealing for restoration of remission lost during sentences. [20185]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 13 March 1996.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question, further to his answer of 7 February, Official Report, column 184, asking for the number of added days restored for offences of unauthorised use of a controlled drug and refusing to provide a sample for drug testing.

Information on the number of added days remitted to prisoners on their application is not collected centrally. However, an investigation of a sample of prisoners who received added days in 1994 for any offence against prison discipline showed that an estimated 1 in 6 added days were remitted.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many random drugs tests were carried out in the male prisons in the random mandatory drugs testing pilot study; and of these tests for each of the months from February to December 1995, how many proved positive for *(a)* cannabis only and *(b)* class A drugs only. [20448]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 13 March 1996.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of random drug tests and the numbers of prisoners testing positive for cannabis and class A drugs.

During the four month initial programme of mandatory drug testing, drug tests were carried out on 1,029 male prisoners. From June until December last year a further 2,010 tests were carried out on prisoners in the initial seven male establishments.

The attached table shows the number of confirmed positive tests for cannabis and for class A drugs in each of the seven male establishments. Because of the way in which the statistics are collected, it is not possible to subtract from these figures samples which were positive for both cannabis and class A drugs.

Numbers of samples confirmed positive for cannabis and class A drugs in seven male establishments, February to December 1995

	Bristol		*Feltham*		*Lindholme*		*Pentonville*	
	C[1]	*A*[2]	*C*[1]	*A*[2]	*C*[1]	*A*[2]	*C*[1]	*A*[2]
February	14	4	26	0	[3]—	[3]—	8	0
March	12	0	20	0	19	0	25	4
April	16	1	11	0	3	0	24	9
May	14	2	16	0	7	1	14	2
June	15	1	14	0	4	4	23	1
July	13	1	21	0	3	0	23	5
August	14	0	11	0	[3]—	[3]—	1	0
September	8	0	12	0	13	1	14	6
October	13	2	12	0	9	2	19	13
November	19	6	17	1	19	8	47	7
December	4	1	14	0	24	7	29	11

	Stoke Heath		*Wakefield*		*Wayland*	
	C[1]	*A*[2]	*C*[1]	*A*[2]	*C*[1]	*A*[2]
February	5	0	0	0	17	1
March	7	0	13	0	15	2
April	5	0	19	0	23	1
May	2	0	16	0	5	1
June	4	0	9	0	23	2
July	5	0	19	3	31	4
August	6	0	6	0	15	2
September	4	0	7	0	10	2
October	0	0	12	1	22	6
November	0	0	11	1	2	5
December	8	1	11	1	20	3

[1] Cannabis.

[2] Class A drugs.

[3] No tests performed that month.

Buckley Hall Prison

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *245–46*, on Buckley Hall prison what were the offences committed by the 10 prisoners who failed to return from authorised leave and are still unlawfully at large and what measures have been taken to recapture these prisoners. [20400]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question, pursuant to his Answer on 6 March, Official Report, column 245–6, asking for details of the offences committed by the ten prisoners unlawfully at large from Buckley Hall prison on 26 February 1996.

The prisoners unlawfully at large had been charged with the following offences:

One: Conspiracy to Rob

One: Wounding

Four: Burglary

One: Escape from Lawful Custody

One: Affray

Two: Robbery

All prisoners who fail to return from authorised leave are reported to the local police.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the ratio of prison officers to prisoners at Buckley Hall prison; and what is the national average ratio of prison officers to prisoners for male category C training prisons. [20371]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alastair Papps to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the ratio of prison officers to inmates at Buckley Hall, and the national average ratio of prison officers to inmates for male category C training prisons.

The information requested, as at 11 March 1996, is shown in the table below. The staffing ratio for publicly managed prisons includes prison officers, senior officers, principal officers and officers working in specialist areas such as healthcare.

Prison establishment staffing: Officer: Inmate ratio

	Officer: Inmate ratio
Buckley Hall	1:3.7
Male category C training prisons	1:2.7

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have failed to return from authorised leave from Buckley Hall prison and have been subsequently caught and brought back since it opened. [20372]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Miss Liz Lynne, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many prisoners have failed to return from authorised leave from Buckley Hall prison and have been subsequently caught and brought back since it opened.

The number of prisoners who failed to return from authorised leave from Buckley Hall prison from the date of its opening on 14 December 1994 to 26 February 1996 and were subsequently caught and brought back is 20. This includes those who returned voluntarily.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of prison officers that have *(a)* been dismissed and *(b)* faced other disciplinary action at Buckley Hall prison since it opened. [20373]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the temporary Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 13 March 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prison officers at Buckley Hall prison, who have either been dismissed or who have faced other disciplinary action since the prison opened.

Since the opening of Buckley Hall prison, no prison officer has been dismissed. Three prison officers have had disciplinary action taken against them.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Truancy, London

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the level of truancy in each London education authority. [20392]

Mr. Robin Squire: Rates of unauthorised absence for maintained primary and secondary schools in each London education authority for the 1994–95 school year up to and including 26 May 1995 are given in the following table:

Unauthorised absence in maintained primary schools in the 1994–95 school year

LEA	*Percentage of half days missed*	*Average number of half days missed per absent pupil*
Inner London		
Corporation of London	0.6	6
Camden	1.5	15
Greenwich	1.7	16
Hackney	1.6	15
Hammersmith and Fulham	1.5	15
Islington	0.9	11
Kensington and Chelsea	1.1	11
Lambeth	1.9	14
Lewisham	1.2	12
Southwark	1.8	15
Tower Hamlets	2.1	14
Wandsworth	0.7	10

Unauthorised absence in maintained primary schools in the 1994–95 school year

LEA	Percentage of half days missed	Average number of half days missed per absent pupil
Westminster	1.5	14
Outer London		
Barking and Dagenham	1.6	13
Barnet	0.4	10
Bexley	0.3	7
Brent	0.8	9
Bromley	0.3	9
Croydon	0.5	9
Ealing	0.5	10
Enfield	0.5	12
Haringey	1.8	15
Harrow	0.4	8
Havering	0.2	6
Hillingdon	1.1	9
Hounslow	0.7	10
Kingston upon Thames	0.4	9
Merton	0.7	11
Newham	2.8	17
Redbridge	0.7	10
Richmond upon Thames	0.2	7
Sutton	0.2	9
Waltham Forest	1.1	11
England average	0.5	10

Source:
The National Pupil Absence Tables 1995, DfEE, November 1995.

Unauthorised absence in maintained secondary schools in the 1994–95 school year

LEA	Percentage of half days missed	Average number of half days missed per absent pupil
Inner London		
Corporation of London	n/a	n/a
Camden	2.2	26
Greenwich	1.8	31
Hackney	3.3	28
Hammersmith and Fulham	2.9	33
Islington	3.1	37
Kensington and Chelsea	2.4	19
Lambeth	2.1	20
Lewisham	2.1	26
Southwark	3.3	28
Tower Hamlets	3.6	25
Wandsworth	2.1	33
Westminster	2.6	20
Greater London		
Barking and Dagenham	2.8	48
Barnet	0.3	12
Bexley	0.9	34
Brent	1.2	21
Bromley	0.5	16
Croydon	0.5	16
Ealing	1.3	29
Enfield	0.4	19
Haringey	1.9	38
Harrow	0.5	27
Havering	0.7	14
Hillingdon	1.5	24
Hounslow	1.0	28
Kingston upon Thames	0.4	17
Merton	1.8	27
Newham	3.6	43
Redbridge	0.4	15

Unauthorised absence in maintained secondary schools in the 1994–95 school year

LEA	Percentage of half days missed	Average number of half days missed per absent pupil
Richmond upon Thames	0.8	17
Sutton	0.3	12
Waltham Forest	1.9	22
England average	1.0	22

Source:
The National Pupil Absence Tables 1995, DfEE, November 1995.

School Buildings (Conditions Survey)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the last national survey of the condition of school buildings was undertaken by her Department; and when further such surveys are planned. [20567]

Mrs. Gillan: The last national survey by the Department that included information on the condition of school buildings was undertaken in 1986 and published in 1987 as the "Survey of School Buildings".

There are no plans for another exercise of this type in the immediate future.

Nursery Voucher Scheme, Manchester

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has had from St. Wilfrid's school in Northenden, Manchester, in regard to the nursery school voucher scheme; what reply she is sending; what action she is taking; and if she will make a statement. [19074]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has received one letter from St. Wilfrid's school, Northenden about the nursery voucher scheme. A reply will be sent shortly.

Purcell School Development Appeal

Mr. Clifton-Brown : To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will assist the Purcell school development appeal. [20876]

Mrs. Gillan: We have decided to make a capital grant of £250,000 towards the Purcell school development appeal. This will encourage private donors also to contribute, and will enable the school to secure the larger premises needed to enhance the specialist education it provides for children with exceptional musical talents. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary grant regulations, the payment will be made within the existing cash limit for class x vote 1 for 1995–96.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prison Service

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been employed within the Northern Ireland Prison Service; and if he will provide a breakdown *(a)* for (i) uniformed and (ii) civilian employees and *(b)* for each institution in each of the last five years. [19509]

Sir John Wheeler: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. D. Shannon to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 13 March 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of staff within the Northern Ireland Prison Service. The figures are based on staff in post at 1st March in each of the last 5 years.

Total staff in post

Year	Discipline staff	Governors	Specialists	Civilians
1992	2,463	105	582	345
1993	2,494	100	582	331
1994	2,507	94	589	325
1995	2,552	91	519	396
1996	2,532	86	445	430

Year	Discipline staff	Governors	Specialists	Civilian
HM prison, Belfast				
1992	556	20	119	17
1993	609	22	120	20
1994	611	20	120	20
1995	335	16	111	32
1996	315	13	85	32
HM prison, Maze				
1992	849	24	178	57
1993	823	24	174	47
1994	843	23	174	47
1995	1,153	23	131	68
1996	1,117	25	126	67
HM prison, Maghaberry				
1992	478	16	128	38
1993	478	16	129	36
1994	481	15	133	34
1995	497	14	126	42
1996	515	15	103	46
HM prison, Magilligan				
1992	397	12	85	19
1993	395	12	87	18
1994	395	11	88	19
1995	377	11	82	31
1996	377	10	71	37
HM Young offenders centre, Hydebank				
1992	168	8	54	12
1993	174	9	54	11
1994	162	8	58	11
1995	174	8	52	20
1996	186	8	43	23
HM prison service college				
1992	15	11	14	18
1993	15	4	13	18
1994	15	4	13	18
1995	16	4	8	13
1996	17	4	7.5	16
Prison service headquarters				
1992	0	14	0	184
1993	0	13	0	184
1994	0	13	0	181
1995	0	15	0	190
1996	5	11	4	209

School Class Sizes

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish class sizes in Northern Ireland primary schools over the past 10 years; and list how many and what percentage were up to 20, 21 to 25, 26 to 30, 31 to 35, 36 to 40 and over 40. [20286]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

Numbers and percentages of classes by class size in Northern Ireland primary schools

	Up to 20		21–25		26–30		31–35		36–40		Over 40	
Year	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage	Number	Per-centage
1986–87	1,039	15.1	1,831	26.6	2,453	35.6	1,346	19.6	204	3.0	8	0.1
1987–88	1,036	15.0	1,881	27.2	2,520	36.4	1,312	19.0	168	2.4	5	0.1
1988–89	1,048	15.0	1,857	26.6	2,521	36.2	1,348	19.3	175	2.5	20	0.3
1989–90	1,060	15.0	1,892	26.8	2,602	36.9	1,345	10.1	143	2.0	7	0.1
1990–91	1,136	16.0	1,979	27.9	2,565	36.1	1,266	17.8	152	2.1	7	0.1
1991–92	1,221	16.9	2,122	29.4	2,614	36.2	1,157	16.0	90	1.2	15	0.2
1992–93	1,404	19.2	2,193	30.0	2,710	37.1	954	13.0	51	0.7	1	0
1993–94	1,755	22.8	2,473	32.2	2,628	34.2	793	10.3	36	0.5	1	0
1994–95	1,828	23.6	2,601	33.7	2,552	33.0	716	9.3	32	0.4	0	0
1995–96	1,810	23.9	2,472	32.6	2,634	34.7	647	8.5	18	0.2	0	0

General National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make available the latest statistics on those taking GNVQs in what fields of study and at which type of educational institution they were studied. [20285]

Mr. Ancram: The information for 1994–95 is as follows. The table showing the number of students following full general national vocational qualification courses was compiled from a survey carried out by the education and training inspectorate. The information about part 1 GNVQ was compiled by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Full GNVQ courses Vocational area	Intermediate [1] GNVQ Schools	FE	Total	Advanced [2] GNVQ Schools	FE	Total
Art and Design	42	88	130	37	299	336
Business	539	288	827	472	1,649	2,121
Health and Social Care	304	248	552	107	845	952
Leisure and Tourism	104	204	308	62	895	957
Manufacturing	94	—	94	—	—	—
Built Environment	18	47	65	—	173	173
Hospitality and Catering	8	44	52	—	142	142
Science	32	21	53	37	75	112
Information Technology	7	26	33	—	46	46
Media: Communications and Production	—	9	9	—	75	75
Engineering	—	17	17	—	43	43
Total	1,148	922	2,140	715	4,242	4,957

[1] Students enrolled on 1 November 1994.
[2] Year 1 students enrolled on 1 November 1993 (now year 2) and year 1 students enrolled on 1 November 1994.

At foundation level 42 pupils were enrolled in health and social care courses in schools in 1994–95; there were no students at foundation level in institutions of further education.

Part 1 GNVQ

Nine schools are involved in piloting part 1 GNVQ—key stage 4—1995–96 at foundation and intermediate levels. The numbers of pupils involved are:

Vocational area	Foundation	Intermediate
Business	14	82
Health and Social Care	28	83
Manufacturing	29	61
Total	71	226

School Building Programme

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment and by what criteria he has made of the adequacy of the capital building programme for schools. [20287]

Mr. Ancram: My Department regularly reviews the capital needs of schools in consultation with the education and library boards and other school authorities. Each year, potential capital projects are reassessed and a priority rating of 1 to 6 is assigned to each project to ensure that available resources are directed to the highest priorities in terms of educational need.

Artistically Gifted Children

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provision is made for the education of artistically gifted children; and at what annual cost. [20279]

Mr. Ancram: The statutory programmes of study are sufficiently broadly couched to enable schools to teach each child, including the most gifted, at his or her own pace. Boards will continue to offer help through their curriculum support services to meet the needs of these pupils, as all others. In addition, children who are especially talented in music or dance may receive assistance to attend certain specialist schools in Great Britain. In 1994–95, my Department supported seven children through this scheme at a cost of £47,000; in 1995–96 four children were supported at a cost of £21,000.

Supported Study Initiatives

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what supported study initiatives his Department has taken; and what assessment he has made of their success. [20280]

Mr. Ancram: Twelve homework centres have been supported under special initiatives. These have been inspected by the Department's inspectorate and my Department is presently considering how the lessons learnt might be applied in future projects.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many surplus places there are within the school system in Northern Ireland. [20281]

Mr. Ancram: Based on the latest estimate in 1994–95 there are 32,000 surplus school places—15,000 in primary schools and 17,000 in secondary schools.

Integrated Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current provision for integrated education in Northern Ireland in terms of *(a)* schools, *(b)* cost, *(c)* pupil numbers and *(d)* percentage of children in such schools. [20282]

Mr. Ancram: There are currently 28 integrated schools in Northern Ireland catering for 5,748 pupils which represents 1.7 per cent. of the total primary and secondary school pupil population. Their total 1995–96 recurrent budget is £13.5 million.

General Teaching Council

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to establish a general teaching council in Northern Ireland. [20283]

Mr. Ancram: None.

Dearing Inquiry

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what contribution he has made to the review by Sir Ron Dearing of qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds; and if he will place it in the Library. [20284]

Mr. Ancram: Apart from setting his remit, the Government have made no input to Sir Ron Dearing's consideration of the issues: that is a matter for him as he considers appropriate. Schools, colleges, training organisations and employers in Northern Ireland were, however, consulted on the same basis as other regions of England and Wales as part of Sir Ron's national consultation exercise, and in that context my officials offered some informal comments. The Government will respond formally when Sir Ron presents his report later this month.

Civil Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what discussions he held with and what notice he gave to *(a)* Commonwealth members and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland of his intention to introduce amendments to the European Communities (Employment in the Civil Service) Order 1986; and if the ban on employment will apply to the children of Commonwealth and Republic of Ireland citizens who are currently in posts but without British nationality; [20401]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* Commonwealth citizens and *(b)* Republic of Ireland citizens currently employed in the civil service. [20402]

Sir John Wheeler: The amendments announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 1 March, *Official Report*, column *771*, and which take effect from 1 June 1996, concern civil service nationality rules, which, for the Northern Ireland civil service, are made under the Civil Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. The amendments are not to the European Communities (Employment in the Civil Service) Order 1991.

On the question of discussions with or notice given to Commonwealth members or the Republic of Ireland, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The eligibility for employment in the Northern Ireland civil service of the children of Commonwealth and Republic of Ireland citizens currently in service will depend, as now, on the nature of the civil service post concerned and the nationality of the individual at the time of application.

No estimate was made of the number of Commonwealth citizens or of Republic of Ireland citizens currently serving in the Northern Ireland civil service. This information is not recorded.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what factors underlay his decision to omit the absent parent's right to a review in the new drafting of the Child Support Agency regulations on clean-break settlements; [17738]

(2) what action he is taking to reinstate absent parents' rights to review when they have applied for clean-break settlements to be taken into account in Child Support Agency maintenance calculations. [17737]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: There is nothing in the regulations introduced in April 1995 relating to property and capital settlements which affects an absent parent's normal review rights.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number and percentage of pensioners claiming (i) council tax benefit and (ii) housing benefit and entitled to, but not receiving, income support. [19765]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people claimed cold weather payments in the area covered by his benefits offices in *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough from mid-December 1995 to the end of February 1996; on which dates they qualified; and what was the total amount paid to those whose claims were met; [19742]

(2) how many times since 1 November 1995 have the *(a)* Leeds and *(b)* Warrington monitoring stations triggered the system of cold weather payments; and if he will make a statement. [19766]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *349*.

Income Support (Administration Costs)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of the total spending on income support is spent on administration costs for *(a)* pensioner recipients, *(b)* non-pensioner recipients and *(c)* all recipients of income support. [20264]

Mr. Roger Evans: The total expenditure on income support that is spent on administration is about 10 per cent. Administrative expenditure is not broken down into costs arising from pensioner and non-pensioner claims.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the impact of the cost of meeting 80 per cent. of local authority expenditure incurred in assisting asylum seekers following benefit withdrawal from Exchequer funds, on the savings he has projected for the benefit changes. [20276]

Mr. Roger Evans: Grants will be paid on unavoidable additional expenditure above a certain threshold and will be assessed in arrears on the basis of claims. Threshold levels are still to be determined. The level of grant will depend on the actual claims made by local authorities.

State Retirement Pension

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will uprate the state pension to one-third of average earnings for each pensioner; and if he will make a statement. [20657]

Mr. Heald: I have no such plans. Retirement pension will rise by 3.9 per cent. next month, in line with the annual increase in the retail prices index to September 1995.

SERPS Rebate

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to announce the new levels of contracted-out rebate to apply from April 1997. [20976]

Mr. Heald: The relevant reports by the Government Actuary and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Social Security, have been laid today together with draft amending orders to establish the level of the rebates for the period beginning in April 1997 in accordance with the Pension Schemes Act of 1993 as amended by the Pensions Act of 1995.

Contracted-out occupational pension schemes and appropriate personal pension schemes provide an alternative to SERPS and thereby relieve the state of part of the liability to provide income in retirement; this is recognised by a rebate on class 1 national insurance contributions. Since April 1993 this has been set at 4.8 per cent. of earnings between the lower and upper earnings limits.

Since the rebate was last set the Pensions Act 1995 has been passed. Amongst other measures designed to restore confidence in the security of pension funds following Maxwell and implement the main recommendations of the subsequent Pension Law Review Committee report, the Act simplified the future arrangements for contracting out of SERPS and introduced a new system of age-related rebates for those contracting out of SERPS into money purchase contracted-out schemes and appropriate personal pensions.

In his report to Parliament, the Government Actuary indicated his view that the contracted-out rebate for salary-related schemes should be set at 4.6 per cent. This figure reflects the fact that, under the new arrangements, individuals will forgo entitlement to the benefits which would otherwise accrue under SERPS; the Government Actuary as required by the new legislation has therefore provided an assessment on the basis of the actuarial value of the SERPS forgone rather than, as at present, the cost of providing guaranteed minimum pensions. We agree with his report and with the figures set out therein, which we propose to split between a 1.6 per cent. rebate for employees and a 3 per cent. rebate for employers.

The Government Actuary's report also discusses the levels of age-related rebate needed in the case of both money purchase and appropriate personal pensions which are required to provide equivalent levels of funded pensions as a replacement for SERPS. His figures include estimates of the expenses of both typical and the more efficient commercial pension providers. We have decided to set the rebates which include an allowance for the reasonable costs and charges of the more efficient providers of appropriate personal pensions and contracted-out money purchase pensions. The new rebates will therefore vary by age from 3.1 per cent. for the youngest member of a money purchase scheme and from 3.4 per cent. for those with personal pensions to a maximum of 9 per cent. We have set the maximum age-related rebates at 9 per cent. to restraint the costs to public finances.

These proposals underline our firm and continuing commitment to the partnership between private and public sector in the provision of pensions. Coupled with our policy of maintaining the value of the basic state retirement pension in line with prices, we believe they will help build on our success in creating a strong pensions structure for the 21st century.

Compensation Recovery

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the value of benefit recovered from persons receiving compensation for personal injury and disability in the last year for which figures are available; how many individual compensation cases were involved; and, as a global figure, what was the proportion of the amount recovered by his Department compared with the total awarded to those seeking compensation and in receipt of reclaimable benefits. [19371]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Peter Mathison to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 12 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what was the value of benefit recovered from persons receiving compensation for personal injury and disability in the last year for which figures are available; how many individual compensation cases were involved; and, as a global figure, what was the proportion of the amount recovered by his Department compared to the total awarded to those seeking compensation and in receipt of reclaimable benefits.

There is no legal requirement for the compensator to notify the Compensation Recovery Unit about the size of settlements. Therefore, the information about the proportion of the award recouped is not available. The rest of the information you requested is given below:

Period	*Number of cases*	*Total amount recovered*
11/4/94—31/3/95	39,915	£110.1M[1]

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

[1] This figure includes monies recovered from both final and interim payments.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

DEFENCE

Ministerial Meetings (France and Germany)

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions have been held between Ministers in his Department and their French and German counterparts; and if he will make a statement. [21081]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I met State Secretary Simon and Délégue Général pour l'Armement Conze on Monday 11 March. I told them that the Government have decided that, subject to amendment of the tender documents to reflect UK requirements, we will join the current competition which is planned to lead to a collaborative programme for an armoured utility vehicle. This decision was welcomed by France and Germany, who have agreed that the industries of all three nations should take part in the project on an equal basis.

I also confirmed that the UK wished to join the armaments agency, which France and Germany announced last year that they would be establishing. We agreed that, once work has been completed on amendments to the tender documents for the armoured utility vehicle, the UK will participate with France and Germany in their current work on the setting up of this agency.

Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has for replacing the anti-oil pollution functions currently carried out from the RMAS depot at Fairlie; [19597]

(2) if he will list the dates on which the RMAS in-house team had discussions with his officials on the strategic implications of concentrating the buoys task at Pembroke and closing Fairlie; [19585]

(3) if he will make a statement on the implications of the RMAS market-testing exercise for the British underwater test and evaluation centre and associated civilian employment at Kyle at Lochalsh; [19586]

(4) what estimate he has made of the time which would be taken for personnel and equipment from Pembroke to arrive at the Clyde nuclear base in the event of an incident; [19587]

(5) on what grounds the lowest tender for the RMAS ports contract was rejected; and if he will make a statement; [19588]

(6) if the privatised parts of the RMAS functions will continue to be subject to royal charter; [19589]

(7) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of *(b)* the location of job losses resulting from the RMAS market-testing exercise; [19590]

(8) what was the value of investment by RMAS at *(a)* Pembroke and *(b)* Fairlie in each of the past five years; [19591]

(9) if he will postpone a final decision on the future of RMAS Fairlie pending an examination of the strategic implications of transferring the buoys task from it to Pembroke; [19592]

(10) if the will list the locations of moorings and navigation buoys currently serviced from the RMAS depot at Fairlie; [19593]

(11) if the bids from Denholm-Serco and Ocean Group in respect of the moorings and navigation buoys functions of the RMAS were predicted on the retention of north and south bases; and if he will make a statement; [19594]

(12) what consultations he has had with NATO concerning the proposed closure of the RMAS depot at Fairlie; [19595]

(13) when his Department was first informed of the proposal to close the RMAS depot at Fairlie, as part of the in-house bid for the moorings and navigation buoys functions of the RMAS. [19596]

Mr. Soames: The results of the market test of marine services announced on 28 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns 553-54, will involve the transfer of the upkeep and maintenance of moorings and navigation buoys from the NATO mooring and support depot—NMSD—Fairlie to the depot at Pembroke. There are no strategic grounds for postponing implementation of this decision and no discussions have been held with the in-house bid team on any such strategic implications.

The invitation to tender—ITT—did not oblige any bidders to use any of the existing MOD mooring maintenance facilities. The commercial bidders and the in-house bid team all elected to operate from one prime depot. The in-house bid team did not select to use NMSD Fairlie as a centre for its moorings and buoys bid. The Department was first made aware of this formally when bids were submitted in May 1995.

The relevant NATO authorities were informed of the market test's potential to affect the MOD's future involvement in NMSD Fairlie. Their long-term intentions in the light of the decision not to use the depot for moorings and navigation buoys work will now be sought. The provision of marine service support to the British underwater test and evaluation centre—BUTEC—at the Kyle of Lochalsh was not included in the ITT and the impact of the market test on this service is a matter for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, which operates the establishment.

The following 15 general locations of moorings and buoys are currently serviced from NMSD Fairlie:

Firth of Clyde
Isle of Skye
Hebrides
Kyle of Lochalsh
Rona and Raasay
Loch Ewe
Loch Eriboll
Cape Wrath
Carlingford loch
Luce bay
Firth of Forth
Ocean met buoys
Moray Firth and Aberdeen
Humber and the Wash
North sea met buoys.

No oil pollution control—OPC—equipment is held at NMSD Fairlie, but the depot has a contingency role in the Clyde port authority emergency plan as a mobilisation point and as a waterfront loading facility. This role will not be directly affected by the market test decision.

No special mooring equipment or personnel are retained at NMSD Fairlie to respond to incidents at HM naval base Clyde. Should mooring materials be required

to support an incident at the base after the task has been transferred to Pembroke dock, the timing would very much depend on the size and amount of equipment involved and whether it could be shipped by road, rail or sea.

Investment at Pembroke and Fairlie over the past five years is as follows:

Pembroke

Financial Year 1993–94: £1.165 million

Financial Year 1994–95: £0.106 million

Financial Year 1995–96: £0.339 million

Of this sum £1.370 million was attributable to the closure of the central salvage depot, Swanmore.

Fairlie

Financial Year 1991–92: £0.031 million.

No part of the marine services is being privatised. The ports element will be Government owned and contractor operated—GOCO. The vessels required by the contractor will continue to be MOD-owned assets and will be operated under bareboat charter conditions, one of which requires the contractor to retain the same livery for the vessels and to fly the RMAS ensign.

The relatively minor cost advantage of the in-house team's bid for the ports contract was outweighed by the much greater potential cost to the MOD associated with the high risk nature of its non-complaint management proposals. The bid failed to achieve a single point of responsibility and accountability at each naval base. Furthermore, no acceptable system for tasking and prioritising marine services resources at each base had been developed.

It is estimated that approximately 500 posts will be surplus to requirements as a result of the market test. The precise details of the reductions have yet to be worked out, but their regional implications are expected to be in the order of 160 at Devonport, 120 at Portsmouth, 200 at Clyde plus 45 at the Bath HQ. Trade Union consultation has now commenced.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he was first informed of the proposal to transfer functions and activities at present performed by vessels, their crews and other personnel located at RMAS Greenock; and if he will make a statement; [19844]

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were employed at RMAS Greenock in each of the past 10 years; [19845]

(3) if he will postpone a final decision on the future of RMAS Greenock until the completion of an analysis of the strategic and financial consequences of the transfer of functions and employment away from RMAS Greenock; [19846]

(4) which *(a)* marine services and *(b)* other activities will continue to be performed by vessels and personnel based at RMAS Greenock, following his decision concerning the marine services market test; and if he will make a statement; [19847]

(5) what guarantees he has sought concerning the continuity of employment and utilisation of *(a)* vessels, *(b)* personnel and *(c)* physical facilities at RMAS Greenock; [19848]

(6) what estimates he has made of the number of jobs which will be lost at RMAS Greenock as a result of his decision concerning the marine services market test; and if he will make a statement; [19849]

(7) if he will list the functions undertaken by RMAS vessels operating out of Greenock in relation to the operations of nuclear submarines in and close to the firth of Clyde; and if he will make a statement; [19850]

(8) on how many occasions RMAS vessels operating out of Greenock have been called to the collisions, near-collisions and other incidents involving *(a)* nuclear submarines and fishing vessels, *(b)* conventional submarines and fishing vessels and *(c)* nuclear and conventional submarines and other vessels in and close to the firth of Clyde in each of the past 10 years. [19851]

Mr. Soames: Ministers gave careful consideration to the results of the marine services market test in the weeks leading up to the announcement on 28 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *553–54*, that the contract for the provision of ports services have been awarded to the private sector consortium, Denholm-SERCO, and the remaining moorings/buoys and armament freighting contracts had been awarded to the in-house team.

The impact of this decision on RMAS Greenock will involve the transfer of moorings/buoys and associated diving activities currently performed there to Pembroke dock, which the in-house team proposes to use as the centre of this task in future. Two vessels, Salmoor and Salmaster, currently based at RMAS Greenock will be affected by this transfer.

Under the management of Denholm-SERCO, RMAS Greenock will continue to provide the full range of marine services under the ports contract to the Clyde area. This will include support to the operations of nuclear submarines in and close to the firth of Clyde, full details of which are classified. No strategic or financial reason is seem to postpone the implementation of the market test at RMAS Greenock, which is expected to lead to significant savings.

Not all of the vessels and personnel currently employed on ports-related tasks will be required under the terms of the new contract. It is too early to estimate how many posts and vessels at RMAS Greenock would be surplus to requirements. This will be the subject of detailed discussions between the Department, Denholm-SERCO and the work force over the coming weeks. Continuity of employment would be provided under the terms of TUPE regulations. It will be subject to full consultation with the work force and its trade union representatives. The utilisation of vessels and facilities would be subject to Denholm-SERCO's requirements. MOD vessels required would be transferred under commercial leasing arrangements and the company intends to operate from the existing great harbour support base making use of most of the buildings.

The number of employees at RMAS Greenock is currently estimated to be some 252.2, of whom some 12.5 are women. It is not possible to provide the information

on employment levels in each of the preceding 10 years and the ratio of men and women employed since data are not held centrally in this format and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Similarly, the details of RMAS vessels called out to collisions or other incidents in the Clyde area in each of the past 10 years is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, it would be standard practice in an emergency involving a collision between an MOD and a commercial vessel for any marine service vessel able to assist to be directed to do so. This would continue to be the case following the market test.

Service Quarters

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from hon. Members regarding empty Ministry of Defence service quarters in Chester. [20377]

Mr. Soames: My Department has not received any representations in the past 12 months from an hon. Member concerning empty dwellings owned by my Department in Chester. One has been received, however, from the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) relating to Cheshire, *Official Report*, 22 May 1995, column *393*.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what representations he has received from hon. Members regarding empty Ministry of Defence service quarters in Gravesham; [20375]

(2) what representations he has received from hon. Members regarding empty Ministry of Defence service quarters in Dover. [20376]

Mr. Soames: My Department has not received any representations in the past 12 months from hon. Members concerning empty dwellings owned by my Department in the Gravesham and Dover areas.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service married quarters are owned by his Department in each parliamentary constituency in Staffordshire; and how many are currently empty. [20374]

Mr. Soames: My Department owns 280 properties in the Stafford constituency at RAF Stafford. Of these, there are 30 vacant service families quarters, of which nine have been allocated to new families in April/May 1996.

My Department owns 205 properties in the Staffordshire, South-East constituency, at Whittington barracks. Of these, 90 are vacant service families quarters, of which 57 have been identified for alienation. Of the remaining 33 empty homes, seven have been allocated for incoming families during April 1996.

Air Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, locations, aircraft types and circumstances of all incidents since June 1993 in which military aircraft have made unintentional contact with the ground or with ground features with special reference to trees and power lines; and which of these incidents involved breaches of low flying regulations. [19744]

Mr. Soames: The information requested for the Army Air Corps and RAF is as follows:

Date	*Location*	*Type*	*Circumstances*
14 October 1993	Lyneham	RAF Hercules	Struck obstruction on approach to land in turbulent conditions
15 November 1993	Kafjord, Norway	RAF Harrier	Wirestrike
2 January 1994	Northern Ireland	RAF Wessex	Wirestrike
19 March 1994	Salisbury plain	RAF Puma	Struck a tree whilst positioning to land
18 May 1994	20 nautical miles north-west of Oban	RAF Puma	Wirestrike
25 May 1994	Salisbury plain	AAC Lynx	Main rotors hit trees whilst the aircraft was hovering
10 October 1994	BATUS, Canada	AAC Gazelle	Strong gust of wind caused the nose to pitch up and tail to hit the ground shortly after take-off
17 October 1994	Germany	RAF Puma	Wirestrike
24 January 1995	Northern Ireland	RAF Puma	Main rotors severed power cable on landing
1 February 1995	Salisbury plain	AAC Gazelle	Main rotors hit some branches whilst the aircraft was hovering
19 October 1995	Sennybridge	RAF Puma	Rotor blades struck a tree following uncommanded yaw on landing
28 February 1996	Northern Ireland	AAC Lynx	Tail of the aircraft struck the ground during landing

The Royal Navy does not hold this information centrally and it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

None of the incidents was formally classified as a breach of United Kingdom military low flying regulations.

Scott Inquiry

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he will take as a result of the finding of the Scott inquiry that the letter written to the hon. Member referred to in D.4.33 concerning changes in the Government's policy on the supply of arms to Iraq was misleading. [16953]

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he will take as a result of the finding of the Scott inquiry that the letter written to the hon. Member referred to in D.4.33 concerning changes in the

Government's policy on the supply of arms to Iraq was misleading. [16957]

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he will take as a result of the finding of the Scott inquiry that the letter written to the hon. Member in D.4.33 concerning changes in the Government's policy on the supply of arms to Iraq was misleading. [16955]

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he will take as a result of the finding of the Scott inquiry that the letter written to the hon. Member referred to in D.4.33 concerning changes in the Government's policy on the supply of arms to Iraq was misleading. [16954]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government continue to take the view that the Howe guidelines were not changed and do not consider that further action is necessary.

Remote Piloting

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flights in United Kingdom airspace by military remotely piloted vehicles were authorised on 6 January 1995. [19750]

Mr. Soames: One such flight was authorised within the Llanbedr danger area—EGD202.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, locations and aircraft types involved in all incidents since 1990 of breaches of low flying regulations which were witnessed by RAF police deployed on covert monitoring duties. [19641]

Mr. Soames: Details of apparent breaches of low flying regulations detected by the RAF police during covert monitoring of the United Kingdom low flying system, including deployments with Skyguard, are as follows:

Date	*Location*	*Numbers and types of aircraft*
2 October 1990	East Leyton, Richmond North Yorkshire	1x RAF Tornado
16 July 1991	Eshottt airfield, Northumberland	3x German Air Force F4
23 September 1991	Keswick, Cumbria	1x AAC Gazelle
24 September 1991	Keswick, Cumbria	1x RAF Harrier GR5
26 September 1991	Keswick, Cumbria	2x French Air Force Mirage
2 July 1992	Beverly/Linley Hill aerodrome, North Humberside	1x RAF Tornado
22 September 1994	Ambleside, Cumbria	1x USAF F15
5 May 1995	Bude, Cornwall	1x RAF Hawk
9 May 1995	Bude, Cornwall	1x RAF Tornado

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what basis the Ministry of Defence police are responsible for security at *(a)* Royal Ordnance premises and *(b)* other private company premises; what payment is made for the service; and if he will make a statement. [20356]

Mr. Soames: Ministry of Defence police are responsible for security at some Royal Ordnance plc premises under the terms of an agreement made in 1985. Ministry of Defence police are not responsible for security at other private company premises. My Department recovers the greater part of the cost of the services of the MOD police from Royal Ordnance plc.

Extended Range Ordnance

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning extended range ordnance under development for the AS 90 SP Howitzer. [20198]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* Proposals for the extended range ordnance and modular charge system for the AS90 SP Howitzer have recently been submitted to my Department by the prime contractor, Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. These proposals are currently being assessed.

M107 Shells

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which companies his Department purchases M107 shells. [20460]

Mr. Arbuthnot: M107 ammunition is currently supplied by Simmel Difesa of Italy.

Simmel

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions the Italian company Simmel has been investigated in relation to United Kingdom procurement fraud; and what action was taken. [20459]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Following an investigation by the Ministry of Defence police fraud squad which commenced in early 1991, James Taylor—a MOD civil servant—was convicted of corruptly agreeing with an agent for Simmel SPA to accept payment by Simmel for hotel accommodation in Venice for himself and his wife to the value of £880. On 22 December 1993 Taylor was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment and ordered to pay £13,500 prosecution costs. A confiscation order for £32,710 was also made. He received concurrent sentences on five other counts of corruptly receiving £24,000 from Gordon Foxley. On the advice of the Crown Prosecution Service no action was taken against Simmel or its agent.

F16 Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of his Department's examination of the option to lease American F16 aircraft. [20458]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In order to ensure the achievement of value for money, the cost-effectiveness of our procurement decisions is routinely tested in a combined operational effectiveness and investment appraisal—COEIA. In the case of the decision to upgrade the Tornado F3's weapons systems, this proposal was tested against alternative options including the lease of F-16 aircraft from the

United States. The estimated total cost of the COEIA was approximately £295,000. The specific costs attributable to evaluating the F-16 option are not separately identifiable.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many vehicles containing more than one consignment of live animals for export were inspected by his officials at the port of Dover, prior to loading on to the MV Sea Road to sail from Dover to Boulogne in the period 1 January to 9 February; and what assessment he has made of whether welfare requirements as to feeding and watering for the purposes of the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 were observed for each consignment. [19891]

Mrs. Browning: During the period 1 January to 9 February 1996, 112 vehicles, carrying more than one consignment, were seen by officials prior to loading on to the MV Sea Road at the port. It is not part of the Ministry's responsibilities to assess whether the statutory welfare requirements are in the event met in respect of each consignment, although checks are carried out.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the country of destination declared on *(a)* the journey plan and *(b)* the health certificate for the purposes of the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 of the vehicle which left Dover on 8 February 1995 loaded with two consignments of calves. [19890]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 11 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *465*.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the MV Caroline conforms with the requirements of the Animals (Sea Transport) Order 1930, as amended, when used for the carriage of livestock from a United Kingdom port. [19889]

Mrs. Browning: No information available to the Ministry suggests that the MV Caroline failed to comply with the appropriate conditions specified in the Animals (Sea Transport) Order of 1930.

Badgers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with the Government of the Irish Republic in respect of the interaction between badgers and tuberculosis in cattle; and if he will make a statement. [19826]

Mrs. Browning: On 7 February, I visited Dublin for discussions with Mr. Deenihan, Minister of State at the Irish Department of Agriculture, to discuss Irish policy in relation to badgers and bovine tuberculosis and in particular to learn of the project which had been undertaken in East Offaly. I found those discussions extremely helpful and will be reflecting on them in the context of the consultations I am currently undertaking on our policy for the control of tuberculosis in cattle.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the re-introduction of a statutory compulsory treatment period to control sheep scab; and if he will make a statement; [20048]

(2) if he will make a statement on the notifiable status of sheep scab; and what plans he has to change that status; [20051]

(3) if he will make a statement on the control of sheep scab; [20047]

(4) if he will make a statement on the control of sheep scab in areas of concentrated common and unfenced grazing land. [20050]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* A public consultation paper was issued by the agriculture departments on 21 December 1995 setting out possible measures to help control sheep scab in Great Britain without detracting from farmers' responsibilities in this area. A copy was placed in the Library of the House.

The paper reflects the Government's latest assessment of the issues. It proposes, among other things, the creation of a criminal offence not to have treated infested sheep with an authorised treatment within a reasonable time of its having become detectable or upon service of a notice by an inspector authorised under the Animal Health Act 1981. The re-introduction of a compulsory treatment period across Great Britain is not, however, proposed.

The paper reiterates the Government's commitment to remove all references to sheep scab in the Animal Health Act 1981, including the requirement to notify the disease. A separate consultation paper will be issued on this specific issue in the spring.

The paper also includes a proposal for a measure to help deal with the particular problem caused by sheep scab in areas of common and unfenced grazing land.

The deadline for comments closed on 1 March 1996. A further round of consultation show follow once the comments received have been evaluated.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Electricity

20. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds of the nuclear electricity industry following privatisation. [18710]

Mr. Eggar: The external financing requirement of the nuclear electricity industry is shown in table 6A.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97".

Information Society Initiative

22. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the information society initiative will be

available through business link offices in the south of England. [18712]

Mr. Page: All business links have information on the information society initiative and I hope that as many as possible will want to be actively involved. A number of business links in the south of England have already expressed an interest and we will be pursuing this with them.

Investment

23. **Mr. Benton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in which investment per head is currently less than in the United Kingdom. [18713]

Mr. Oppenheim: In 1994 investment per head was lower than in the United Kingdom in Finland, Greece, Ireland, Mexico, Sweden and Turkey. Since 1979 business sector investment has been a larger proportion of GDP in the UK than in France, Germany, Italy and the US.

Electrical Sockets

26. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the proposed EU directive on electrical sockets. [18716]

Mr. Eggar: There is no proposal for an EU directive on electrical sockets. We understand that the European electrotechnical standards body, CENELEC, which is industry-led, will shortly put a new proposal for a harmonised European standard for plugs and sockets to national standards committees for consultation and voting. The Government continues to keep a watch on developments in CENELEC.

Derelict Coal Mining Areas

28. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new initiatives his Department is introducing to bring industry into derelict coal mining areas; and if he will make a statement. [18718]

Mr. Page: A substantial package of measures was put in place to help regenerate coal areas, set out in a parliamentary answer by the Minister for Industry and Energy on 19 July 1994. As he points out, the 1993 assisted areas map included assisted area status for a number of these areas. They continue to benefit from eligibility for regional selective assistance.

British Coal Enterprise

29. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the chairman of British Coal to discuss the future of British Coal Enterprise. [18719]

Mr. Page: My ministerial colleagues and I meet the chairman of British Coal as necessary to discuss a range of issues. Officials in my Department remain in close touch with British Coal about the future of British Coal Enterprise.

Information Super-highway

30. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to encourage small businesses to use the information super-highway. [18720]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My right hon. friend, the President of the Board of Trade launched the information society initiative on 13 February; a four-year programme in which up to £35 million of new money will be invested. It will help United Kingdom businesses to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies to boost their competitiveness.

This new framework of support and awareness programmes is a partnership between industry and Government, addressed at all who work in manufacturing, service and creative sectors—particularly small and medium sized companies.

Manufacturing Output

31. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the change in the level of manufacturing output in the last 12 months. [18721]

Mr. Eggar: Over the last 12 months manufacturing output was at a record level, almost 2 per cent. higher than a year earlier.

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the growth in manufacturing output since 1990. [18709]

Mr. Eggar: Since the end of 1990 manufacturing output has grown by 3.5 per cent.

Gas Consumer Council (Complaints)

32. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the level of complaints to the east midlands office of the Gas Consumer Council in 1995. [18722]

33. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the level of complaints to the west midlands office of the Gas Consumer Council in 1995. [13723]

Mr. Eggar: It will be for British Gas Trading Ltd. to take the steps it judges necessary to retain customer loyalty as competition approaches. Similarly, the service business, which is already operating in a competitive market, will need to meet that competition.

Manufacturing Investment

34. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the level of manufacturing investment per head in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [18724]

Mr. Oppenheim: In 1993 manufacturing investment per employee was £2,800 in the United Kingdom, £4,900 in the US, £3,700 in Canada and Finland, £3,500 in Denmark, £3,400 in Germany and £2,900 in Sweden. UK manufacturing industry invested a similar proportion of its output to Germany and the US over the last economic cycle.

Manufactured Exports

35. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on manufactured exports. [18725]

Mr. Oppenheim: The volume of manufactured exports grew by almost 7 per cent. last year and has nearly doubled since 1979. Since the mid 1980's our share of the volume of world trade in manufactures has stabilised after years of decline.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, columns *140–41*, if he will list in each case *(a)* the value of the offer and *(b)* the name of the firm and the constituency in which it is located. [15626]

Mr. Oppenheim *[pursuant to his reply 20 February, Official Report, column 91]:* Information by constituency is as follows. For reasons of commercial confidentiality we do not publish information on individual offers accepted until the first payment of grant has been made.

Offer value (£000)	*Firm*	*Constituency*
1,500	Kostal UK Ltd.	Barnsley East
3,000	Mion Electronics Ltd.	Barnsley East
250	Shafton Eng. Services Ltd.	Barnsley East
320	WGF Colcoton Garn Hasenack and Co.	Barnsley East
700	David Brown Transaxles Ltd.	Barnsley West and Penistone
450	William Cook Cast Products Ltd.	Barnsley West and Penistone
270	Colony Gift Corporation Ltd.	Barrow and Furness
960	Orbitel Mobile Communications Ltd.	Bassetlaw
250	Parkam Foods Ltd.	Batley and Spen
250	Windcrown Ltd.	Beverley
750	Mackie Automotive Systems (UK) Ltd.	Birkenhead
350	Britton's Plastics Ltd.	Birmingham Erdington
700	Hozelock Ltd.	Birmingham Erdington
400	Siemens Lighting Ltd.	Birmingham Erdington
250	Stampings Alliance Ltd.	Birmingham Erdington
5,000	LDV Ltd.	Birmingham Hodge Hill
480	Motion Finance Ltd.	Birmingham Hodge Hill
950	EIP Metals Ltd.	Birmingham Ladywood
500	Lucas Industries plc	Birmingham Ladywood
2,000	Fujitsu Telecommunications Europe LT	Birmingham Small Heath
600	Durham Plastic Ltd.	Bishop Auckland
500	EBAC Ltd.	Bishop Auckland
350	Presswork (Metals) Ltd.	Bishop Auckland
700	Tallent Eng. Ltd.	Bishop Auckland
250	WM Allison and Sons Ltd.	Bishop Auckland
200	B. Robinson and Co Ltd.	Blackburn
200	East Lancashire Coachbuilders Ltd.	Blackburn
200	Eurobind (UK) Ltd.	Blackburn
475	Express Eng. (Thompson) Ltd.	Blaydon
400	Quality Software Products Ltd.	Blaydon
980	Romag Security Laminators Ltd.	Blaydon
200	Audus Noble Ltd.	Blyth Valley
8,250	Europa Magnetics Corporation Ltd.	Blyth Valley
900	Merck Sharp and Dohme Ltd.	Blyth Valley
830	Beloit Walmsley Ltd.	Bolton North East
250	Fiesta Fine Foods Ltd.	Bolton South East
240	Star Vale Ltd.	Bolton West
600	British Leather Co. Ltd.	Bootle
300	Seton Healtcare Group Ltd.	Bootle
250	Hunters Armley Ltd.	Bradford North
250	Drummond Group plc	Bradford West
210	Kashmir Crown Bakeries and Sweets	Bradford West
525	Katsouris Foods Ltd.	Brent South
700	Kolak Enterprises Ltd.	Brent South
250	Maison Blanc Ltd.	Brent South
500	Geest Foods Ltd.	Brigg and Cleethorpes
950	Geest Plc.	Brigg and Cleethorpes
12,000	Kimberly-Clark Ltd.	Brigg and Cleethorpes
950	Paramount Packaging Corporation	Brigg and Cleethorpes
355	Printpack Europe Ltd.	Bury North
325	Ryalux Carpets Ltd.	Bury North
260	Warburton Holgate Ltd.	Burh South
250	Albion Pressed Metal Ltd.	Cannock and Burntwood
7,000	MBNA International Bank Ltd.	City of Chester
4,500	Philips Electronics UK Ltd.	City of Durham
270	C Fresh Products Ltd.	Copeland
250	Sekers Fabrics Ltd.	Copeland
270	Ashbury Confectionery Ltd.	Corby
600	Peavey Electronics (UK) Ltd.	Corby
9,400	Jaguar Cars Ltd.	Coventry North West
1,700	Motor Panels (Coventry) plc	Coventry North West
200	Marvic-Empe Ltd.	Coventry South East
570	Surface Technology plc	Coventry South East
365	Cunnington and Cooper Ltd.	Denton and Reddish
950	FHT Holdings Ltd.	Doncaster Central
900	Kaye Aluminium plc	Doncaster Central
300	MS International plc	Doncaster Central
240	Noel Village (Steel Founder)	Doncaster Central
600	RFS (E) Ltd.	Doncaster Central
550	Omega plc	Doncaster North
960	Polycarb Ltd.	Doncaster North
250	G Clancey Ltd.	Dudley East
200	Zeus Aluminium Products Ltd.	Dudley West
220	Aldona Seals Ltd.	Easington
250	BHK (UK) Ltd.	Easington
300	Claremont Garments Ltd.	Easington
850	Dewhirst Ltd.	Easington
400	Pride Valley Foods Ltd.	Easington
310	Pride Valley Foods Ltd.	Easington
200	Seaward Electronic Ltd.	Easington
250	TRW Occupant Restraint Systems Ltd.	Easington
275	Vaux Group plc	Easington
850	Merlin Flexible Packaging Ltd.	East Lindsey
1,400	Geo L Scott and Co. Ltd.	Ellesmere Port and Neston
500	SHS Handling Systems	Ellesmere Port and Neston
400	Vauxhall Motors Ltd.	Ellesmere Port and Neston
300	1 W Ltd.	Ellesmere Port and Neston

Offer value (£000)	Firm	Constituency
350	Allen and Heath Brenell Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
950	Contico International Inc.	Falmouth and Cambourne
1,400	Contico International Inc.	Falmouth and Cambourne
275	European Springs Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
250	Falfab LLC	Falmouth and Cambourne
850	Falmouth Oil Services (1994) Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
220	Fibre Data Group Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
400	Magrathea (Pendennis) Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
400	Market Reach Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
350	Pendennis Shipyard Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
700	Redruth Brewery (1792) Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
480	Redruth Brewery Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
200	Redruth Brewery Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
1,250	Roach Foods Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
848.5	ROM Data Corporation Ltd.	Falmouth and Cambourne
225	Flexadus Plastics Ltd.	Gainsborough and Horncastle
300	Bonas Machine Co Ltd.	Gateshead East
300	Express Eng. (Thompson) Ltd.	Gateshead East
950	NEI Clarke Chapman Ltd.	Gateshead East
975	KSR Automotive Ltd.	Glanford and Scunthorpe
650	Rexene Corporation	Glanford and Scunthorpe
200	Roxburgh Electronics Ltd.	Glanford and Scunthorpe
350	Sauce Company Ltd.	Glanford and Scunthorpe
1,200	Skippingdale Paper Products Ltd.	Glanford and Scunthorpe
1,800	Bluecrest Foods Ltd.	Great Grimsby
10,000	Courtaulds Fibres (Holdings) Ltd.	Great Grimsby
240	Rice Fields	Great Grimsby
500	Anglo Blackwells Ltd.	Halton
950	ELF Atochem UK Ltd.	Halton
700	European Technological Composites LT	Halton
200	Lion Foods Ltd.	Halton
388	North West Corrugated Products Ltd.	Halton
214	Paxar Europe Ltd.	Halton
275	Plastech Extrusions Ltd.	Halton
212	Spectrum Packaging Ltd.	Halton
600	TAC Metal Forming Ltd.	Halton
400	Oxford Chemicals International plc.	Hartlepool
300	Stadium Ltd.	Hartlepool
250	Stadium Ltd.	Hartlepool
350	Sweet "N" Savoury Frozen Foods Ltd.	Hartlepool
450	THC Fabricators (UK) Ltd.	Hartlepool
500	Dalau Ltd.	Harwich
225	Surya Rice Ltd.	Harwich
250	National Carriers T A Exel Logistics	Hexham
500	Appliance Control Tech. Europe	Houghton and Washington
350	Brian Reed (Northern) Ltd.	Houghton and Washington
4,000	LG Electronics North of England Ltd.	Houghton and Washington
980	Lucas SEI Wiring Systems Ltd.	Houghton and Washington
350	Perlos Ltd.	Houghton and Washington
250	Perlos Ltd.	Houghton and Washington
300	Reydel Ltd.	Houghton and Washington
450	TRW Transportation Electronics Ltd.	Houghton and Washington
1,500	TRW Transportation Electronics Ltd.	Houghton and Washington
650	Caligen Foam Ltd.	Hyndburn
600	Cooper Dauphin Plc.	Hyndburn
510	Lucas Automotive Ltd.	Hyndburn
425	NIPA Laboratories Ltd.	Hyndburn
500	Vikoma International Ltd.	Isle of Wight
200	Compass Seafood Processors Ltd.	Kingston upon Hull West
2,650	T J Smith and Nephew Ltd.	Kingston upon Hull West
1,800	Delco Electronics Overseas Corp.	Knowsley North
799	Kodak Ltd.	Knowsley North
240	Petrolite Ltd.	Knowsley North
250	Torvincrete Ltd.	Knowsley North
400	Beauvale Contracts Ltd.	Knowsley South
650	Halewood Vintners Ltd.	Knowsley South
500	Lucas Aerospace Ltd.	Knowsley South
200	Savoury Kitchen Ltd.	Langbaurgh
342	C L Marsden Wafers Ltd.	Leigh
210	Indmar Sheetmetal Ltd.	Leigh
900	Townsend Cycles Ltd.	Leigh
300	Plysu Plc.	Littleborough and Saddleworth
275	Renold Power Transmission Ltd.	Littleborough and Saddleworth
500	Sonoco Ltd.	Littleborough and Saddleworth
800	Scientific Hospital Supplies Ltd.	Liverpool Broadgreen
500	Bonar Carton Systems Ltd.	Liverpool Garston
1,800	Evans Medical Ltd.	Liverpool Garston
625	Johnson Controls Automotive (UK) Ltd.	Liverpool Garston
600	Newforge Foods Ltd.	Liverpool Garston
450	Raybestos UK Ltd.	Liverpool Garston
1,826	J F Renshaw Ltd.	Liverpool Mossley Hill
1,200	BEOCO Ltd.	Liverpool Riverside
1,000	Norham Multi Leisure Ltd.	Liverpool Riverside
500	Plastic Omnium Ltd.	Ludlow
925	A T Group Ltd.	Makerfield
450	B R and M Holmes	Makerfield
450	W.T. Mather Ltd.	Makerfield
220	CBA Enterprise Ltd.	Manchester Gorton
260	Cowie Technology Group Ltd.	Middlesborough
640	Lionweld Kennedy Ltd.	Middlesborough
400	Peter Vassallo Ltd.	Newcastle upon Tyne Central
2,800	Scottish and Newcastle Beer Product Ltd.	Newcastle upon Tyne Central
300	Dunlop Coflexip Umbilicals Ltd.	Newcastle upon Tyne East
500	European Airways Ltd.	Newcastle upon Tyne North

Offer value (£000)	Firm	Constituency
600	Gill Aviation Ltd.	Newcastle upon Tyne North
310	Print Design and Graphics Ltd.	Newcastle upon Tyne North
215	Lobbs Clotted Cream Ltd.	North Cornwall
675	T J Press (Padstow) Ltd.	North Cornwall
500	Parker Hannifin Plc.	North Devon
325	Selkirk Manufacturing Ltd.	North Devon
500	Thomson IBL Ltd.	North Devon
450	Wrafton Laboratories Ltd.	North Devon
900	Aerospace Systems and Technologies Ltd.	North Durham
250	Autotreads and Accessories Ltd.	North Durham
300	Montan Group Ltd.	North Durham
250	Nippon Silica Glass Europe Ltd.	North Durham
600	Schmitz Cargobull (UK) Ltd.	North Durham
400	Burall Plastec Ltd.	North East Cambridgeshire
600	G W Padley (Poultry) Ltd.	North East Cambridgeshire
225	Florada Garden Buildings Ltd.	North Thanet
650	Navico Ltd.	North Thanet
200	Sandwich Factory Ltd.	North Warwickshire
200	David's Smith Packaging Ltd.	North West Durham
325	George Blair Ltd.	North West Durham
285	Kenmore Refrigeration Equipment (UK) Ltd.	North West Durham
350	Brink (UK) Ltd.	Nuneaton
950	Delco Chassis Ltd.	Nuneaton
200	Exact Precision Ltd.	Nuneaton
950	Lear Seating (UK) Ltd.	Nuneaton
350	Sterling International Technology Ltd.	Nuneaton
500	Ferranti Technologies Ltd.	Oldham Central and Royton
649	Siemens Measurements Ltd.	Oldham West
320	Barden Corporation (UK) Ltd.	Plymouth Devonport
300	Environment Europe Ltd.	Plymouth Devonport
400	Tecalemit Systems Ltd.	Plymouth Devonport
220	The Wrigley Co Ltd.	Plymouth Devonport
600	Hazlewood Foods Plc.	Plymouth Sutton
210	Philidas	Pontefract and Castleford
900	Stolzle Flaconnage Ltd.	Pontefract and Castleford
300	LUK (UK) Ltd.	Rother Valley
500	NCSI Ltd.	Rother Valley
500	Safety-Kleen UK Ltd.	Rother Valley
400	Extec Screens and Crushers	Rotherham
750	London and Scandinavian Metallurgical	Rotherham
400	Colgate-Palmolive Ltd.	Salford East
1,000	Black and Decker International	Sedgefield
950	Black and Decker Ltd.	Sedgefield
250	Oshino Manuf. (UK) Ltd.	Sedgefield
250	Tomado Ltd.	Sedgefield
449	Neill Tools Ltd.	Sheffield Attercliffe
400	The Stanley Works Ltd.	Sheffield Attercliffe
250	Thomas Food Partnership Ltd.	Sheffield Attercliffe
550	Aurora Group Ltd.	Sheffield Central
230	Fisher Karpark Holdings Ltd.	Sheffield Central
370	G.T. Tubes Ltd.	Sheffield Central
220	Jacobs Manuf. Co. Ltd.	Sheffield Hallam
1,700	Johnson Controls Automotive (UK) Ltd.	Sherwood
325	Niche Plastics Ltd.	Sherwood
300	Chase Advanced Technologies	Shipley
225	Filtronic Ltd.	Shipley
900	Pace Micro Technology Ltd.	Shipley
850	Ginsters Ltd.	South East Cornwall
250	Topfoto Services Ltd.	South East Cornwall
222	Omitec Electro-Optics (OEC) Ltd.	South Hams
450	Standard Products Ltd.	South Hams
750	Vidamed International Ltd.	South Hams
3,000	Interconnection Systems Ltd.	South Shields
400	McNulty Offshore Services Ltd.	South Shields
300	Tyne Dock Eng. Ltd.	South Shields
450	Blowspeed Industrial Mouldings Ltd.	South Thanet
245	Cohnen GBR	South Thanet
650	Concorde Manuf. Ltd.	Southport
625	Leaf UK Ltd.	Southport
227	Philips Components Ltd.	Southport
330	Hoogovens Aluminium Europe Ltd.	St. Helens North
200	Nichols Foods Ltd.	St. Helens North
700	Sasib Bakery UK Ltd.	St. Helens North
200	Senator Plastics Ltd.	St. Helens North
200	Bob Allan Ltd. T A Allanprint	St. Helens South
250	ENA Shaw Ltd.	St. Helens South
950	Pilkington (Glass Technologies) Ltd.	St. Helens South
400	Printpack Europe Ltd.	St. Helens South
1,500	Ravenhead Co. Ltd.	St. Helens South
850	Triplex Safety Glass Co. Ltd.	St. Helens South
200	Vastflex Ltd.	St. Helens South
250	Grower Marketing Services	St. Ives
400	St. Ivel Ltd.	St. Ives
325.6	United Vegetables Ltd.	St. Ives
500	Cambrex Inc. (USA)	Stockton North
200	Cleveland Chemicals Ltd.	Stockton North
300	CPL Aromas plc	Stockton North
2,000	Samsung Electronics Manuf. (UK) Ltd.	Stockton North
8,500	Samsung Electronics Manuf. (UK) Ltd.	Stockton North
3,000	Samsung Electronics Manuf. (UK) Ltd.	Stockton North
300	Stockton Casting Co Ltd.	Stockton North
310	Whaley Welding Co Ltd.	Stockton North
800	British Polythene Ltd.	Stockton South
480	Elta Plastics Ltd.	Stockton South
550	Fairclough Eng. Ltd.	Stockton South
650	Hygena Ltd.	Stockton South
450	LNP Eng. Plastics UK Ltd.	Stockton South
380	Combined Power Systems Ltd.	Stretford
1,000	Fermec Manuf. Ltd.	Stretford
475	Cavendish Insurance plc	Sunderland North
1,100	Homeworthy Furniture Ltd.	Sunderland North
450	Hygieia Healthcare Ltd.	Sunderland North
350	Immunogen International Ltd.	Sunderland North
200	Integrated Automation Systems Ltd.	Sunderland North
950	Liebherr-Great Britain Ltd.	Sunderland North
495	Liebherr-Great Britain Ltd.	Sunderland North
220	Food for Thought (UK) Ltd.	Sunderland South
750	Preferred Technical Group Cha. Ltd.	Sutton Coldfield
330	ENTA Technologies Ltd.	The Wrekin
400	MITAC Europe Ltd.	The Wrekin
225	SIFAM Ltd.	Torbay

Offer value (£000)	Firm	Constituency
200	AMP of GB Ltd.	Torridge and West Devon
750	B and S Screw Machine Services Ltd.	Torridge and West Devon
600	Heathcote and Ivory Ltd.	Torridge and West Devon
750	Roach Foods Ltd.	Truro
200	HFW Plastics Ltd.	Tyne Bridge
3,250	ONWA Electronics (UK) Ltd.	Tyne Bridge
900	Formics Ltd.	Tynemouth
1,225	Bristol-Myers Squibb Pharmaceut Ltd.	Wallasey
572	Chemdal Ltd.	Wallasey
400	Manor Bakeries Ltd.	Wallasey
750	A and P Appledore Holdings Ltd.	Wallsend
950	Cookson Entek Ltd.	Wallsend
900	Freudenberg Angus LP	Wallsend
350	Sterling Tubes Ltd.	Walsall North
850	Special Products Lemforder	Walsall South
200	Walsall Lithographic Co Ltd.	Walsall South
285	Bals Industrial Accessories Ltd.	Wansbeck
250	Synpac Chemicals Ltd.	Wansbeck
425	Vald Birn (UK) Ltd.	Wansbeck
480	European Industrial Services Ltd.	Warley East
1,200	Albright and Wilson Ltd.	Warley West
375	Caradon Stelrad	Wentworth
360	Pyronix Ltd.	Wentworth
250	Waterstone Glassware Ltd.	Wentworth
500	Hilti Industries (GB) Ltd.	West Bromwich East
500	Barretts and Baird (Wholesale) Ltd.	West Bromwich West
300	Brockhouse Forgings Ltd.	West Bromwich West
400	Garton Eng. Plc	West Bromwich West
350	Robinson Bros. Ltd.	West Bromwich West
250	VIR Poultry Products Ltd.	West Bromwich West
270	BHC Aerovox Ltd.	West Dorset
450	DEK Printing Machines Ltd.	West Dorset
230	Watts Industrial Tyers Ltd.	West Gloucestershire
325	BAGIR (UK) Ltd.	West Lancashire
1,400	Gas Control Equipment Ltd.	West Lancashire
330	Kammac 1988 Ltd.	West Lancashire
600	LEM HEME Ltd.	West Lancashire
200	Rowan Products Ltd.	West Lancashire
400	Sanko Gosei UK Ltd.	West Lancashire
760	Snack Factory Ltd.	West Lancashire
305	Tomkins Plc	West Lancashire
200	Volex Group plc	West Lancashire
450	Westbrook Packaging Ltd.	West Lancashire
350	Hitchen Foods Ltd.	Wigan
925	Longwall Roof Supports Ltd	Wigan
695	Motor Panels Plc	Wigan
600	Northern Counties Ltd.	Wigan
285	Delta Label Systems Ltd.	Wirral South
560	KELCO Ltd.	Wirral South
400	Sun Valley Ltd.	Wirral South
1,600	Cooper (GB) Ltd.	Wirral West
650	Ajax Electrical Ltd.	Wolverhampton North East
800	Cowal Leisure Ltd.	Workington
700	Dalgety Spillers Foods Ltd.	Workington
250	Lakeside Lanes Ltd.	Workington
500	Sammi Sound Technology (UK) Ltd.	Workington
2,290	Eaton Ltd.	Worsley

Telecommunications (Key Escrow)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *229*, if he will make an assessment of the impact on Britain's civil liberties of the adoption of a telecommunications key escrow. [20467]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The rights of the individual, and those of civil liberties, will be fully taken into account, as will the responsibility of the Government to protect the interests of the state and its citizens against serious crime, in any decisions the Government may make concerning the provision of confidentiality services on public networks.

Nuclear Industry (Privatisation)

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the current state of negotiations to sell the United Kingdom nuclear industry to Duke Power. [18692]

Mr. Eggar: There are no negotiations with Duke Power.

Local Enterprise Councils

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many local enterprise councils are currently supported out of public funds; how much money is involved; and if he will make a statement. [18981]

Mr. Page: Local enterprise agencies are private sector companies and are not directly supported from public funds. Many, however, will have contracts with their local training and enterprise council or business link to deliver a range of services to the local business community.

Fireworks

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were killed or injured as a result of accidents involving fireworks in each year since 1966 by region and firework type. [20206]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The numbers of firework injuries since 1966, in total and by firework type, are given in the figures.

Analyses of firework accidents by region have been published and are available for 1990 and succeeding years until 1994. Copies of these analyses have been deposited in the Library of the House.

For years earlier than 1990, obtaining regional data would incur disproportionate cost.

	Others	Bangers	R Candles etc.	Rockets	Sparklers	Total accidents
1967	803	638	568	317	—	2,326
1968	897	798	586	385	—	2,666
1969	624	533	363	206	—	1,726

	Others	Bangers	R Candles etc.	Rockets	Sparklers	Total accidents
1970	410	379	257	167	—	1,213
1971	414	334	232	134	—	1,114
1972	531	391	270	132	—	1,324
1973	447	379	294	129	—	1,249
1974	452	237	159	79	—	927
1975	350	208	119	89	—	766
1976	274	159	89	91	72	685
1977	291	178	112	87	65	733
1978	388	212	160	122	71	953
1979	310	190	124	73	48	745
1980	240	135	81	66	33	555
1981	257	167	107	102	48	681
1982	284	147	84	71	40	626
1983	333	184	114	107	95	833
1984	320	175	103	115	65	778
1985	373	241	90	197	67	968
1986	358	161	88	159	80	846
1987	432	163	96	174	95	960
1988	366	162	83	164	102	877
1989	361	136	89	131	83	800
1990	344	158	66	144	93	805
1991	316	146	68	92	101	723
1992	355	170	71	169	177	942
1993	504	169	40	156	189	1,058
1994	743	268	95	215	253	1,574

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the volume of firework sales in each of the last five years. [20208]

Mr. Taylor: The number of individual fireworks sold to consumers throughout Great Britain in the years 1991 to 1995 is estimated by my Department as follows:

Year	Million
1991	134
1992	138
1993	141
1994	154
1995	[1]172

[1] Provisional.

These figures have been drawn from discussions with all parts of the industry.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the latest firework injury statistics; and what evidence he has as to how they relate to the changing volume of fireworks on the market. [20207]

Mr. Taylor: The firework injuries statistics from the 1995 census in Great Britain are not yet available but should be so by the end of this month. Analysis of the relation of accident numbers to sales volume will be possible when the statistics are available.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many firework injuries occurred on new year's eve 1995. [20205]

Mr. Taylor: An estimate of the number of firework accidents occurring on 31 December 1995 would have to be based on data collected in a sample of hospital accident and emergency units by the home accident surveillance system. These data are not yet available.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the latest firework injury statistics for 1995 by region and by firework type. [20204]

Mr. Taylor: Statistics from the 1995 census of fireworks injuries are not yet available but my Department hopes to publish them before the end of this month.

Mergers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the proposals by the European Commission to reduce the thresholds according to which mergers are brought under European Commission jurisdiction. [20335]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Commission has issued a Green Paper outlining various proposals for reform of the EC merger regulation, including possible threshold reductions. Once the United Kingdom and other member states have made their views known it will be for the Commission to decide whether it wishes to proceed with formal proposals to the Council.

"Employers Guide to Stress"

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what costs his Department incurred in the production of the employers guide to stress. [20547]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department of Trade and Industry incurred no costs in connection with the production of the Health and Safety Executive's document 'Stress at Work: A Guide for Employers'.

Employment Rights

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Green Paper, "Resolving Employment Rights Disputes: Options for Reform." [21080]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government intend to publish, for consultation, a draft Bill on industrial tribunals. The draft Bill will contain important reforms to streamline the industrial tribunals system. It will also aim to increase the proportion of employment rights disputes

resolved by employees and employers themselves, or through conciliation by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service or by other third party means. These proposals were widely welcomed in our consultation on the Green Paper, "Resolving Employment Rights Disputes: Options for Reform".

We intend to publish and consult on the Bill in the summer. Consultation on an advance draft of the Bill will help give tribunal users a better opportunity to comment on legislation of direct interest to them; identify any remaining areas of contention so that they can be considered before the Bill is introduced and so aid implementation of changes to the tribunal system. This will help us to produce better legislation and ensure that the changes we are proposing to make are of benefit and are workable.

Robotics (Nuclear Plant Decommissioning)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on robotic technology used in the decommissioning of nuclear power stations; and if he will make a statement. [18706]

Mr. Page: None. Operations at licensed nuclear sites must be carried out to the satisfaction of the nuclear installations inspectorate. The procurement and evaluation of research into the decommissioning of nuclear power stations is the responsibility of the operators of those stations.

Orimulsion

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had since 15 February alleging orimulsion to be toxic and advocating a ban on its importation into the United Kingdom; and what studies his Department has undertaken of the arguments adduced in those Organisations for Economic Co-operation and Development countries which have (i) considered and (ii) implemented such a ban. [19648]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Since 15 February my Department has received no such representations; nor has my Department undertaken any studies of OECD countries' decisions concerning orimulsion. However, in 1992 a research study was carried out on behalf of the Department of the Environment which reviewed the impacts of orimulsion and the pollution abatement technologies which may be applied to orimulsion-fired boilers.

I understand that Milford Haven port authority has produced a report about the likely effects of spillages of up to one thousand tonnes of orimulsion into the Haven. This report is on the planning public register.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20091]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* None of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department has a statutory base except the Industrial Development Advisory Board. The answers to the other questions are as follows:-

(a) none except the Council for Science and Technology and the Advisory Committee on Arbitration Law who may sometimes publish their advice to Government;

(b) none except the British Overseas Trade Board, the Industrial Development Advisory Board, the Regional Development Advisory Boards and the Advisory Committee on Coal Research;

(c) none except the British Overseas Trade Board, the Industrial Development Advisory Board and the Regional Development Advisory Boards.

In each of the exceptions listed in *(a)* to *(c)* above it is voluntary rather than under a statutory requirement.

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20108]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *912–13*.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Scott Inquiry

Sir David Madel: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total cost to public funds of the Scott inquiry for arms for Iraq. [18653]

Mr. Freeman: The total cost to date of Sir Richard Scott's inquiry is assessed as £6,344,000.

This figure includes the direct salary, legal and other estimated costs of the inquiry itself; the direct salary cost of officials wholly employed on matters relating to the inquiry—but not the cost of officials who have worked on inquiry-related matters from time to time as part of their normal duties, which is unquantifiable; the cost of providing external legal services for witnesses to the inquiry, and the value of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's Department—some legal advice has been provided by Government lawyers as part of their normal duties, which is also unquantifiable and therefore not included.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what have been the costs incurred for each draft deregulation order in respect of *(a)* printing, *(b)* consultation and *(c)* drafting and amending orders. [18652]

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally. Such costs as there are will be primarily incurred by the lead Department, which is responsible for consulting on the proposed changes and then for drafting, amending and printing the order.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what discussions he held with and what notice he gave to *(a)* Commonwealth members and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland of his intention to introduce amendments to the European Communities (Employment in the Civil Service) Order; and if the ban on employment will apply to the children of Commonwealth and Republic of Ireland citizens who are currently in posts but without British nationality; [20403]

(2) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of Commonwealth citizens and *(b)* Republic of Ireland citizens currently employed in the civil service. [20404]

Mr. Freeman: The amendments which I announced on 1 March, *Official Report* column *771*, and which take effect from 1 June are made, for the home civil service under the Minister's powers in the Civil Service Order in Council 1995, and, in Northern Ireland, under the Civil Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. The amendments are not to the European Communities (Employment in the Civil Service) Order.

No discussions about the changes were held with Commonwealth Governments or with the Republic of Ireland. They were notified of the changes by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the day before the announcement was made.

No estimate has been made of the number of Commonwealth and of Republic of Ireland citizens currently employed in the Civil Service. This information is not recorded.

Whether the children of Commonwealth and of Republic of Ireland citizens who are currently employed in the civil service will be eligible for employment in the civil service, will depend, as now, on the nature of the post concerned and the nationality of the individual at the time of the application.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 14 March 1996

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid Board

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the members of the Legal Aid Board were last appointed or reappointed; and how many complaints he has had about the boards or their individual members since the start of 1995. [19645]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The current members of the Legal Aid Board, with their most recent dates of appointment or reappointment, are as follows:

Sir Tim Chessels (*Chairman*): 4 May 1995
Fred Collins: 1 April 1995
John Crosby: 5 April 1994
Jean Dunkley: 2 May 1994
Colin George: 3 May 1994
Kate Markus: 1 March 1993
Steve Orchard: 1 January 1994
Diana Payne: 2 May 1994
Penelope Pearce: 1 July 1993
George Pulman: 1 March 1993
David Sinker: 2 May 1994
Andrew Thomas 1 April 1993

My predecessor and I have received numerous letters about the operations of the Legal Aid Board since January 1995. A number of these have been critical of aspects of the board's work.

In addition, there are 1,183 lawyers serving on the 13 Legal Aid Board area committees, which hear appeals on various legal aid matters. The appointment or reappointment of their members is the responsibility of the Legal Aid Board.

Court of Protection

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the practice rules relating to the Court of Protection were last revised; and if he will make a statement. [20073]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Public Trust Office is best placed to provide an answer. I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

Letter from Julia Lomas to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 14 March 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 7 March 1996, asking when the practice rules relating to the Court of Protection were last revised.

The Court of Protection Rules and the Court of Protection [Enduring Powers of Attorney Rules] were last revised in 1994. They were made on 29 November 1994, laid before Parliament on 1 December 1994 and came into effect on 22 December 1994.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Commonwealth Scholarships

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Commonwealth scholarships were funded by the Government in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and what is the planned number for 1996–97. [20045]

Mr. Hanley: A total of 7,144 Commonwealth students were given awards to study and train in the UK in 1994–95. Figures for 1995–96 are not yet available but are likely to be broadly similar.

The number of scholarships is likely to fall in 1996–97 due to reductions in the various budgets from which awards are funded and policy changes to improve the effectiveness of training within the UK's bilateral country aid projects.

DEFENCE

Works of Art

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made since the start of the National Audit Office inquiry into the management of works of art with the recovery of those works of art reported to be missing or stolen. [20566]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Since the start of the National Audit Office study in January 1995, one work of art has been recovered, in addition to the 15 that had been found before the study began. Two works of art listed as missing by the Government art collection were found to be duplicate records of works that were not missing. Four works recorded as missing by the Government art collection were found to have been returned to their lender.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the works of art belonging to the departmental art collection which are considered missing or stolen; [20561]

(2) if he will list the works of art on loan from the Government art collection that are considered missing or stolen. [20565]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am placing the information requested in the Library of the House.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions he has taken to safeguard works of art loaned to his Department. [20755]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Works of art are safeguarded by securing the rooms in which they hang, asking the staff who occupy those rooms to verify that the works are safe and by inspections by staff responsible for works of art.

Royal Navy (Female Members)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many female members of the Royal Navy,

having served one tour on a ship at sea, have volunteered for a second tour. [20516]

Mr. Soames: Female members of the Royal Navy—in common with their male counterparts—do not volunteer for tours on a ship at sea; they are required to go to sea according to the exigencies of the service. To determine how many women have served at sea for two or more tours is not possible without incurring disproportionate costs.

Army Medical Staff

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of medical staff required by the Army in conflict are reservists; and how many of these posts are manned. [20517]

Mr. Soames: The proportion of medical personnel required by the Army in conflict, who are ex-Regular reservists or members of the Territorial Army, and the number of posts to be filled by them, will depend on the nature of the operations at the time.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the number of medical staff required for each brigade in a conflict. [20518]

Mr. Soames: Depending on the size of a brigade, the number of medical personnel required varies between 199 and 206.

Female Soldiers (Bosnia)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many female soldiers have returned early from service in Bosnia because of pregnancy; and what this figure is as a percentage of the female soldiers serving in Bosnia. [20519]

Mr. Soames: My Department has no record of any female soldier returning early from service in Bosnia because of pregnancy.

Air Training Corps

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the Air Training Corps concerning the availability of surplus uniforms for its use; and what is his policy on the provision of surplus uniforms for use by the Air Training Corps. [20749]

Mr. Soames: No representations on this matter have been made by the Air Training Corps. It is the policy of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency that any part-worn or superseded items of uniform clothing are made available to cadet organisations before disposal. In addition, those Royal Air Force units which parent Air Training Corps squadrons are required to consider the needs of these squadrons before disposing of surplus uniform items.

Armed Forces (Manpower)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the *(a)* trained and *(b)* untrained strength of (i) the Army, (ii) the RAF and (iii) the Royal Navy at (1) 1 April 1996 and (2) 1 April 1997 under his Department's current plans. [20751]

Mr. Soames: The forecast trained and untrained strengths for the services at the specified dates are as follows:

Army

	Trained	*Untrained*
1 April 1996	104,000	8,000
1 April 1997	101,000	10,000

These figures include forecast Gurkha strengths, but exclude the Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service Force).

Royal Air Force

	Trained	*Untrained*
1 April 1996	62,700	2,250
1 April 1997	54,700	2,700

Royal Navy

	Trained	*Untrained*
1 April 1996	45,000	3,000
1 April 1997	42,000	4,000

These figures include the Royal Marines and Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current shortfall in manpower for the Army; what action he has taken to reduce this shortfall; and if he will make a statement. [20752]

Mr. Soames: The trained strength of the Army is expected to be below its establishment by around 3,000 personnel as at 1 April 1996. The shortfall is primarily due to poor recruitment and retention.

A number of measures have been introduced to make good the shortfall. These include the payment of a retention bonus to soldiers in those arms with the greatest deficits who choose to serve beyond the minimum three-year commitment. A bounty has also been offered to suitable ex-Royal Artillery, Royal Armoured Corps and Infantry soldiers who left in the last three years and who are below the age of 30 who accepted an invitation to re-enlist. A further bounty has been offered to soldiers who persuade friends to enlist, and we have substantially increased the recruiting and advertising budget. A revised programme for the closure of Army careers offices has been agreed, coupled with an initiative, launched in January, to recruit through the Employment Service network. In addition, some 400 Gurkhas who would otherwise have been made redundant will be retained for three years from 1977.

Next month we are holding a conference on "Armed Forces recruiting in the 21st Century", to which members of the careers service and the Employment Service throughout the UK have been invited, with the aim of developing ways of working together to attract the young people the armed forces need.

Trident Programme

Sir Jim Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme; and if he will make a statement. [21359]

Mr. Portillo: The current estimate of the total project cost of the Trident programme, with all expenditure, including payments already made, brought up to current prices and the exchange rate assumed in the long term costing of the defence programme is £12,153 million. If payments already made are expressed at the prices and exchange rates actually incurred, with future spend on constant bases, the equivalent estimate is now £9,926 million. Expenditure on the Trident programme to 31 October 1995 represented some 83 per cent. of the latter estimate.

The revised estimate of £12,153 million represents an increase in cash terms of £471 million. After allowing for the effects of inflation and exchange rate variations there is a real cost increase of £112 million, or less than 1 per cent. Despite this variation since last year, the programme continues to show an overall reduction in real terms on its original 1982 estimate. This reduction, including the savings resulting from the decision to process missiles at the United States facility at King's Bay Georgia now stands at some £3.4 billion.

The proportion of the estimate for work undertaken in the United Kingdom has increased from 71 per cent. to 72 per cent. reflecting the effects of the change in exchange rate, price base and volume changes in the year.

I am pleased to confirm that HMS Victorious, the second of the four planned Vanguard class submarines, entered service on time at the end of last year and is now operational. The remainder of the Trident submarine programme is also still on schedule. I am, as in previous years, sending to the Chairmen of the Public Accounts Committee and of the Select Committee on Defence a more detailed report on the programme. I am also placing a copy of this report in the Library of the House.

Ethnic Minorities

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policies he has introduced to increase the number of ethnic minorities in the armed forces. [20753]

Mr. Soames: The services are committed to a range of measures to increase ethnic minority recruitment. These include increased use of recruiters from an ethnic minority background, better representation of ethnic minority service personnel in recruiting literature, special training for recruiters, production of brochures in ethnic minority languages to target parents, development of contacts with ethnic minority communities and advertising in the ethnic minority press and on local radio.

Each of the services' recruiting organisations has an officer responsible for making contact with ethnic minority organisations to ascertain the best approach to take to aid the recruitment of ethnic minorities.

In addition, we have appointed an independent consultant, the Office for Public Management, to undertake a review of existing service and civilian equal opportunities policies and employment initiatives for ethnic minority groups and recommend any improvements.

Otterburn Training Range

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recent developments in respect of his Department's plans to enlarge the Otterburn training range. [20805]

Mr. Soames: My Department's proposals are not to enlarge Otterburn training area, which lies largely within the Northumberland national park, but to provide additional infrastructure to accommodate essential AS90 and multiple-launch rocket system training. My officials have been in discussion with the Northumberland national park authority for over two years about these proposals, with the aim of achieving an acceptable balance between my Department's training requirements and environmental concerns. While much progress has been made in this direction, I was very disappointed to learn that, at its meeting on 11 March, the national park authority resolved to object to my Department's proposals unless further scheme changes and environmental balancing measures were forthcoming. This is the first occasion that the national park authority has made its position expressly clear about each individual element of the scheme and accompanying balancing package.

It is difficult to see how these further measures could be accommodated, given that my Department's proposals represent the minimum infrastructure requirements for AS90-MLRS training.

My officials are, nevertheless, now considering whether it will be possible to meet the further concerns which have now been expressed by the national park authority, and it is my intention that a statement of my Department's position should be prepared for submission to the policy and resources committee of Northumberland county council when it meets on 25 April, prior to final determination by the full county council on 15 May 1996.

Service Boarding Scheme

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many children who received support through the service boarding scheme attend *(a)* Finsborough school, Suffolk, *(b)* Quantock school, Somerset, *(c)* Rodney school, Nottingham and *(d)* Lime House school, Cumbria; and how much each school received in each of years (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1994–95 and (iv) 1995–96. [20793]

Mr. Soames: In the case of Quantock school, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *478*.

As at June 1995 the number of children who received support through the service boarding school allowance scheme, attending the other three schools in question, were:

Finsborough School: 123

Rodney School: 26

Lime House School: 90

The information on how much each school has received during the last four academic years is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Racism

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many incidents of racism have been investigated by his Department in each of the last five years; [20754]

(2) what measures his Department uses to monitor racism in the armed forces. [20804]

Mr. Soames: The armed forces are fully integrated, non-discriminatory organisations, subject to the Race Relations Act 1976. It has been made clear throughout the services that racial abuse or discrimination of any sort will not be tolerated.

The three services monitor complaints involving a racial element; details of numbers of recorded cases are:

Royal Navy

No cases have been recorded in the Royal Navy since the central recording of these complaints began in February 1995.

	Number of cases	*Number of cases substantiated*
Army		
1990	3	Nil
1991	4	1
1992	7	3
1993	5	3
1994	4	Nil
1995	[1]6	—
1996	[1]1	—
Royal Air Force		
1990	0	—
1991	2	Nil
1992	3	Nil
1993	2	1
1994	1	Nil
1995	3	1

[1] Four under investigation in 1995 and 1 in 1996.

As for civilian staff within the Department, the information requested is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that have been stolen or are otherwise unaccounted for from the former Department for Education and its agencies in each of the past five years, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [19413]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table details the cost and number of items of equipment which were recorded as stolen or unaccounted for during each financial year from 1991–92 to 1995–96. Of the items recorded during this period, only one falls into the valuation category of £5,000 or more. This is a dispatch van, stolen in January 1996 and not yet recovered.

Department for Education: Value and number of items lost

	Number of items	*Item(s) valued at £5,000 and over*	*Total value (£)*
1991–92			
Furniture	0		
IT equipment	0		
Other equipment	0		
Totals 1991–92	n/k		0.00
1992–93			
Furniture	0		
IT equipment	0		
Other equipment	0		
Total 1992–93	n/k		0.00
1993–94			
Furniture	0		
IT equipment	6	n/a	8,000.00
Other equipment	0		
Total 1993–94	6		8,000.00
1994–95			
Furniture	0		
IT equipment	21	n/a	20,700.00
Other equipment	0		
Total 1994–95	21		20,700.00
1995–96 (to date):			
Furniture	0		
IT equipment	19		23,400.00
Other equipment	1	Despatch van	8,000.00
Total 1995–96	20		31,400.00
Total for the period	47		60,100.00

School Premises

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what representations she received from *(a)* local education authorities, *(b)* school governors and *(c)* organisations representing school governors regarding the removal of minimum space requirements for teaching accommodation and recreation space during the consultation on the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981; and if she will make a statement; [20569]

(2) what plans she has to place the responses to *(a)* the five-year review of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 and *(b)* the consultation on School Premises Regulations 1996 in the Library; [20568]

(3) what representations she received on *(a)* class size and *(b)* the condition of school buildings by local education authorities or governors during the consultation on the Education (School Premises) Regulations in 1995. [20571]

Mrs. Gillan: The review of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 was an internal one. Its conclusions were reported to Ministers by officials and were not intended for publication.

A summary of the response to last year's consultation has been placed in the Library of the House.

The new regulations take account of many specific suggestions from consultees. Few, if any, responses specifically mention the condition of school buildings. A number of consultees made the incorrect assumptions that there is a link between the removal of minimum teaching and recreation areas and increased class sizes or overcrowding and that, once the new regulations come into force, there will be no yardsticks for assessing new and existing buildings.

In fact, governors and local education authorities will continue to have exactly the same control over admissions as they do now, and new guidance documents to be published by the Department in the summer will be up to date and wide reaching in scope.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place a copy of the Department's action plan responding to the recent efficiency scrutiny into the TEC contract and management fee in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [21189]

Mr. Paice: A copy of the action plan that the Department has produced in response to the findings of the scrutiny has been placed in the Library. A copy has also been sent to all TECs.

The efficiency scrutiny was a thorough and timely piece of work which should help the Department to reduce the administrative burden on TECs. We accept the vast majority of its recommendations. A number have already been implemented.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in her Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19428]

Mr. Sproat: The information could be extracted in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

National Lottery

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list for each region and by distributing body *(a)* the number of projects that have received lottery funding and *(b)* the amount. [20380]

Mr. Sproat: A report on the distribution of national lottery proceeds is placed in the Library of the House each month which includes information in the format requested. The February edition will be placed in the Library of the House in the coming week.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which projects in Nottinghamshire have benefited from lottery funding; and what sums they have received. [20378]

Mr. Sproat: To date, 60 awards totalling £8.9 million have been made to organisations in Nottinghamshire. They are:

National Lottery awards in Nottinghamshire

Body	*Announced*	*Recipient*	*Location*	*Amount*
Arts	6 February 1996	Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery	Nottingham	1,750,000.00
Arts	6 July 1995	Nottingham Media Centre Ltd.	Nottingham	1,320,000.00
Arts	6 July 1995	Nottingham Theatre Trust Ltd.	Nottingham	825,000.00
Sports	11 March 1996	Nottingham Squash Rackets Club	Nottingham	772,000.00
Sports	4 may 1995	Rushcliffe Leisure Centre	Nottingham-shire	540,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	The Zone Youth Project	Nottingham	250,000.00
MC	22 February 1996	St. Martha's Community Project	Nottingham	243,600.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Nottingham Black Initiative	Nottingham	208,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Ashfield Women's Centre	Kirby In Ashfield, Nottingham	200,000.00
Sports	10 January 1996	Broxtowe Borough Council	Nottingham-shire	177,943.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Anejo	Nottingham	150,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Play Centre for Children with Disabilities	Nottingham	148,430.00
Arts	6 February 1996	Gujarat Samaj—Nottingham	Nottingham	139,865.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Hyson Green Youth Club	Nottingham	135,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	DIAL Mansfield & District	Mansfield, Notts	126,146.00
NLCB	20 November 1995	Nottingham Counselling Centre	Nottingham	124,015.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service	Nottingham	104,640.00
Arts	21 September 1995	Nottingham Community Arts	Nottingham	96,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Pakistan Centre, Nottingham	Nottingham	95,000.00
Sports	11 March 1996	Nottingham-shire County Sailing Club	Nottingham-shire	89,800.00
NLCB	20 November 1995	Build Nottingham Mentor Programme	Nottingham	83,204.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Age Concern Nottingham-shire	Nottingham	81,500.00
Arts	21 September 1995	Bingham Infants Self Help Group	Nottingham-shire	80,000.00

National Lottery awards in Nottinghamshire

Body	Announced	Recipient	Location	Amount
Arts	6 February 1996	Hindu Temple Cultural and Community Centre	Nottingham	77,625.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	The Saturday Club	Mansfield, Notts.	76,440.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Broxtowe Womens Training Group	Strelley, Notts.	76,000.00
NHMF	23 November 1995	Erewash Meadows and Flashes	Notts. and Derby	75,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Path East Midlands Ltd.	Radford, Notts.	70,000.00
Sports	10 January 1996	Boughton Parish Council	Nottingham-shire	68,540.00
Sports	6 September 1995	Arnold Boys' Football Club	Nottingham-shire	59,000.00
Sports	7 June 1995	British Canoeing Union Sprint Racing Com	Nottingham-shire	57,515.00
Sports	4 May 1995	Gedling Borough Council	Nottingham-shire	57,000.00
Sports	4 May 1995	Nottingham-shire County Rowing Association	Nottingham-shire	52,800.00
NLCB	20 November 1995	Nottingham Mencap	Nottingham	51,180.00
Sports	9 August 1995	Moderns Rugby Club	Nottingham-shire	47,973.00
Arts	16 October 1995	Gedling Borough Council	Nottingham	41,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	St. Philips Church Top Valley	Top Valley, Notts.	40,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Rutland CAB, Grantham	Grantham, Notts	37,527.00
Sports	11 March 1996	Radcliffe on Trent Bowling Club	Radcliffe on Trent, Notts.	33,683.00
Arts	23 November 1995	East Midlands Shape	Nottingham	31,500.00
Sports	6 December 1995	Southwell Parish Council	Nottingham-shire	31,000.00
Sports	4 May 1995	Newark and Sherwood District Council	Nottingham-shire	28,000.00
Sports	8 November 1995	Lound Water Ski Club	Nottingham-shire	26,000.00
Arts	6 July 1995	Harley Foundation	Nottingham-shire	20,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Bulwell Vision	Bulwell, Notts.	18,450.00
Sports	9 August 1995	Whatton and Aslockton Parish Councils	Nottingham-shire	17,500.00
Sports	11 March 1996	Stanton by Dale Cricket Club	Ilkeston, Notts.	17,000.00
Arts	24 May 1995	CODA	Nottingham City	16,500.00
Sports	5 July 1995	Fernie Fields Sports Club (Vanaid Fc)	Nottingham-shire	10,188.00

National Lottery awards in Nottinghamshire

Body	Announced	Recipient	Location	Amount
NLCB	19 December 1995	Bulwell Community Toy Library	Nottingham, Nottingham	9,887.00
Sports	9 August 1995	Dukeries Gliding Club	Nottingham-shire	9,700.00
Arts	16 October 1995	Nottingham Trent University	Nottingham	7,750.00
Sports	4 May 1995	Worksop Cricket and Sports Club Bowls	Nottingham-shire	6,955.00
Sports	9 August 1995	Burton Joyce Tennis Club	Nottingham-shire	6,000.00
Sports	8 November 1995	Kimberley Miners Welfare Football Club	Nottingham-shire	3,700.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Ashfield Play Care Scheme	Sutton in Ashfield, Nottingham-shire	3,000.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Allsorts	Edwalton, Nottingham	2,800.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	S.P.A.C.E.	Kirkby in Ashfield, Nottingham	2,200.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	1st Blidworth (St. Mary's) Brownies	Mansfield, Nottingham-shire	1,100.00
NLCB	19 December 1995	Playwell Parent and Toddler Group	Long Eaton, Notts.	600.00
Total				8,931,256.00

TREASURY

Close Companies

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals declared themselves close company men for the purposes of tax relief in each of the last three years. [18172]

Mr. Jack: Corporation tax records held centrally do not enable us to identify close companies or those with only one individual associate.

Former British Rail Employees (Travel Passes)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Inland Revenue calculates the personal tax liability for railway status travel passes and staff travelcards issued to former British Rail employees who now work for private railway companies; what estimate he has made of the revenue which will be raised in a full tax year as a result of tax deductions for these travel passes and cards; and what tax deductions were made for these passes and cards when issued by British Rail to its own employees. [19608]

Mr. Jack: Employees are generally liable to tax on vouchers for free or cheap travel. The taxable benefit is the cost to the employer of providing the voucher. However, there is statutory exemption from the tax charge for British Rail employees earning less than £8,500 per year. This exemption continues for people who were

employed by British Rail on 11 January 1994, even if as a result of the Railways Act they are transferred to Railtrack, a train operating company, or certain other successor bodies which are engaged in the railway industry.

No estimate exist of the amounts of revenue raised, now or in the past, in connection with the issue of travel passes and cards.

Smuggling

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many smuggling operations have been broken up in each year since 1987; and what estimate he has made of the extent of smuggling. [19857]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No statistics are available for years prior to 1990. The number of smuggling organisations which have been broken up as a result of the work of the Customs and Excise investigation division in each year since then is as follows:

1990–91: 180

1991–92: 183

1992–93: 178

1993–94: 188

1994–95: 172

There are too many uncertainties to form any reliable estimate of the extent of smuggling of prohibited or restricted goods. Customs and Excise is at present working with the drinks and tobacco industries to improve estimates of the extent of smuggling of excise duty goods.

EU Budget

Mr. Radice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the net payments made to the European Union budget by the 12 member states in 1994, on a per capita basis. [20464]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The table sets out the figures. These are drawn from the European Court of Auditors' calculations of member states' total financial contributions to and receipts from the European budget published in the "Annual Report covering the financial year 1994". Net payments figures show the balance from the two sides of the budget, by deducting total receipts from the gross contribution for each member state. A minus sign therefore indicates that a member state receives more from the EU budget than it pays.

The figures for net payments can only be indicative because the Court of Auditors does not allocate all Community spending by member states. In particular, administrative spending in Belgium is not fully attributed. In addition, net payments can vary significantly from year to year owing to adjustments in own resource payments and fluctuations in receipts.

The Commission has committed itself to provide a detailed breakdown of member states' receipts from the Community budget on an annual basis once the new own resources decision comes into force. This, together with Commission figures on member states' gross contributions, should help provide us with more information about member states' net payments.

Net payments to the EU budget in 1994 (in ecu per head)

Germany	167.7
Netherlands	119.6
France	45.4
Italy	44.5
Belgium	30.6
UK	19.9
Denmark	–38.2
Spain	–79.7
Portugal	–184.5
Greece	–370.4
Ireland	–486.7
Luxembourg	–634.3

These figures are net of the UK's abatement.

Income Tax

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average rate of income tax in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987, *(d)* 1992 and *(e)* the latest year for which figures are available for those taxpayers on *(a)* half average personal income, *(b)* average personal income and *(c)* twice average personal income. [20345]

Mr. Jack: Standard comparisons are based on calculating income tax liabilities with incomes at multiples of full-time male average earnings—adult rates, all occupations. These are given in tables 13.6a to 13.6c of the 1995–96 tax benefit reference manual, a copy of which can be found in the Library.

Estimates for 1996–97 are given in the table.

	Multiple of average earnings[1]		
	0.5	*1*	*2*
Single person	13.7	18.9	26.1
One earner married couple with no children	11.1	17.6	25.5
One earner married with two children under 11[2]	1.3	12.6	23.0

[1] Full time males, adult rates, all occupations.

[2] Net of child benefit.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on employment of the measures necessary to meet the budget deficit criteria for membership of the European monetary union. [20336]

Mr. Waldegrave: None. It is in any case the Government's objective to bring the public sector borrowing requirement back towards balance over the medium term. The achievement of sound public finances is a necessary condition for a sustained increase in employment.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the most recent recommendations made by the European monetary committee on the progress of the United Kingdom towards achieving the Maastricht convergence criteria for economic and monetary union. [20597]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Article 109c of the treaty on European Union explains the role of the monetary committee in preparing the work of the Council. The most recent Council recommendation on the progress of the UK towards achieving the Maastricht convergence criteria was the recommendation of 12 July 1995 with a view to bringing an end to the situation of an excessive deficit in the UK.

Exports (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total value of exports from Wales in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [20648]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The location of the business enterprise making an export is not held by HM Customs and Excise; only the address registered for VAT purposes is available which may be at a different location within the UK. Consequently regional analyses of the trade statistics are not produced, and information relating to the value of exports by business enterprises located in Wales is not available.

Scott Inquiry

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons and at what level in his Department were involved in considering the Government's response to the report of the Scott inquiry. [16560]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 22 February 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 February, *Official Report*, columns *239–40.*

Building Societies Review

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish his building societies review; and if he will make a statement. [18563]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 4 March 1996]:* I hope to publish a draft Building Societies Bill on Monday 18 March, for three months' consultation.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20089]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* The School Teachers Review Body has a statutory base. Its reports, containing its recommendations to the Government, are published under a statutory requirement and laid before Parliament. Similarly, the other pay review bodies'—covering the armed forces; doctors and dentists; nursing staff, midwives, health visitors and professions allied to medicine; and senior salaries—recommendations are published and laid before Parliament, but not under any specific statutory requirement.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meeting and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20106]

Mrs. Knight *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* The pay review bodies take evidence from the interested parties. The School Teachers Review Body does so under a statutory requirement. The other pay review bodies do so voluntarily.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the discrepancy between the originating capital debt allocated to the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals national health service trust in SI No. 350 and that set out in the Treasury minute on dissolution and reconfiguration of certain national health service trusts. [20329]

Mr. Horam: I have been asked to reply.

The amount of originating capital debt allocated to the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals national health service trust represents the excess of the valuation of the assets over the liabilities which were transferred to it on, or in connection with, its establishment. The figure in SI No. 350—£135,395,656 split evenly between public dividend capital and interest-bearing initial loan—was arrived at by aggregating the values of land and buildings provided by the district valuer, the values of equipment taken from the asset registers and the values of debtors and creditors taken from the audited books of account of the two dissolved trusts. These values were certified by auditors appointed by the Audit Commission prior to the setting of the OCD of the new trust.

The figures contained in the departmental minute on the dissolution and reconfiguration of certain NHS trusts which was presented by the Treasury on 20 February 1996 are the liabilities outstanding to the Consolidated Fund at 1 April 1995 in respect of the OCD and further long-term loans issued by the Secretary of State for Health to Royal Liverpool University Hospital NHS trust and Broadgreen Hospital NHS trust before their dissolution. These liabilities, which were transferred to Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals national health service trust, were left out of account in determining the latter's net assets for the purposes of SI No. 350.

The total of £114,112,928 proposed to be remitted comprises:

	£
Royal Liverpool Hospital Trust	
OCD—Initial loan	34,112,288
OCD—PDC	39,665,451
Further borrowing	7,531,600
Total	81,309,339

	£
Broadgreen Hospital NHS Trust	
OCD—Initial loan	15,042,059
OCD—PDC	17,491,230
Further borrowing	270,300
Total	32,803,589

There need not be any direct relationship between the public debt of a dissolving trust or trusts and the OCD of any successor body. The former arises as a result of the OCD set at some point in the past, based on net asset values at that time, and subsequently changes as a result of principal repayments and new borrowing. The latter is based on the net asset values at current valuation on the date of a trust's establishment.

Mrs. Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy not to implement the Treasury minute on the dissolution and reconfiguration of certain national health service trusts—remission of outstanding debt, until he has published an explanation of the calculations of the basis contained therein. [20355]

Mr. Jack: The explanation is as follows:

The amounts totalling £448,876,543 which are proposed for remission are the outstanding liabilities to the Consolidated Fund as at 31 March 1995 of seven NHS trusts which were dissolved on 1 April 1995. These liabilities are in respect of their outstanding originating capital debt, which is deemed under section 9(3) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 to have been issued out of moneys provided by Parliament, and their further borrowings and any issues of public dividend capital from the Secretary of State for Health which have been paid out of moneys provided by Parliament.

The figure of £494,027,365 is the total originating capital debt of the five new trusts, which were established on 1 April 1995 from mergers of the dissolved trusts with each other or with directly managed unit. The trusts concerned are listed in paragraph 7 of the minute, and their individual originating capital debt is specified in SI 350. In accordance with section 9(1) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, each new trust's originating capital debt represents the excess of the valuation of the assets over the valuation of the liabilities transferred to it on or in connection with its establishment.

The difference between the newly created capital debt and the amounts being written off reflects differences in composition and valuation between the net assets of the new trusts and those of the dissolved trusts concerned.

PRIME MINISTER

Exports (Iraq)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the minute circulated on 1 August 1990 of the meeting chaired by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 19 July 1990 in regard to the changing of the 1985 Howe guidelines concerning the sale of goods to Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [20331]

The Prime Minister: This document was submitted as evidence to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry. I understand that Sir Richard Scott proposes to publish as soon as possible any documents which he considers relevant to his report, consistent with his procedures.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 14 March. [19239]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House of Commons Notepaper

Mr. Morgan: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, (1) what representations he has had concerning the die-stamping of House of Commons notepaper with the official stamp and portcullis crest by Wilprint Ltd. since October 1995; [20852]

(2) when Wilprint Ltd. won the contract for die-stamping the official stamp and portcullis crest on the notepaper of the House; and what is the duration of the contract. [20853]

Mr. Beith: I have received one representation from the hon. Member himself. Her Majesty's Stationery Office is, of course, responsible for contracts with individual firms, but I can tell the hon. Member that the contract for die-stamping House of Commons stationery was awarded by HMSO to Wilprint Ltd. in February 1995 after competitive tender. The contract will cease in October 1996.

ENVIRONMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he has computed the figure of 80 per cent. in determining what percentage of local authority costs in meeting the needs of asylum seekers should be met by Her Majesty's Government, following the withdrawal of social security benefits. [20275]

Mr. Curry: The Government consider that it is a reasonable basis for making additional resources available to local authorities in England for this purpose for 1995–96 and 1996–97.

North Lincolnshire Authority

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide additional

financial assistance to North Lincolnshire authority similar to that which has been announced for Scottish unitary authorities; and if he will make a statement. [19985]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend has already provided that some £2.182 million is to be paid to North Lincolnshire under section 88A of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to recompense North Lincolnshire district council for the income forgone as a consequence of the transitional reduction of council taxes under the Local Government Changes for England (Council Tax) (Transitional Reduction) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No. 176 as amended by SI 1996 No. 333).

We have no plans to make further assistance available.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of funding is projected for the current financial year and each financial year to the year 2000 for the Energy Saving Trust from *(a)* gas consumers, *(b)* electricity consumers and *(c)* other private sector sources. [20395]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 9 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *4*, which outlined the Government's proposed funding of the Energy Saving Trust. The trust is an independent company and non-Government funding is a matter for the trust.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, column *102*, if he will list the steps taken to ensure full compliance with the Environmental Protection (Applications, Appeals and Registers) Regulations 1991 in respect of the recent variation of the authorisation to burn secondary liquid fuel granted to Castle Cement under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [20348]

Mr. Clappison: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution issued the variation to Castle Cement on 23 January 1996 under section 10 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and followed all the requirements set out in this and in part II of schedule 1 to the Act, which sets out how variations are to be treated. The inspectorate treated the variation as substantial for the purposes of section 10 and consulted all those prescribed in SI 507. The inspectorate put copies of all notices and other papers as required by the Act on the public registers and carefully considered all the comments it received both from statutory consultees and elsewhere before taking its decision.

Local Authorities (Sale of Interests)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environmental if he will list the local authorities which have sold their interests in *(a)* a municipal bus company, *(b)* crematoria and *(c)* airports in the current year to date. [20454]

Sir Paul Beresford: To date, in the financial year 1995–96 no local authorities have sold their interests in municipal bus companies. Pendle borough council hopes to complete the sale of its share in the Burnley and Pendle Bus Company soon. Two airport sales have been completed in this period. Dorset county council and Bournemouth borough council sold their interests in Bournemouth International Airport plc to National Express. Mid, South and West Glamorgan councils sold their interests in Cardiff International Airport Ltd. to TBI, a local company. Information on the sale of crematoria has not been collected centrally. In September 1996–97 we propose to request information on the sale of assets which have been subject to targeted relaxations in the amount required to be set aside under the capital finance system. Bus companies, crematoria and airports are among these.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by rank order the debt of each local authority expressed as a money sum per head of population. [20745]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have today placed the information requested in the Library of the House.

CITES Regulations

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that annexe D of the draft Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species regulation contains a fully representative list of species. [20758]

Mr. Clappison: My Department is playing full part in the negotiations with other member states in consultation with our scientific advisors at the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the royal botanic gardens, Kew.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many questions were tabled to his Department in each Session since 1987–88; how many were not answered on the grounds of disproportionate cost; what percentage of the total number of questions this represented; how many were not answered on the grounds that the information was not centrally available; and what percentage of the total number of questions this represented. [21149]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Special Areas of Conservation

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will be providing guidance on the establishment of management schemes for special areas of conservation under the EC habitats directive. [21192]

Mr. Clappison: The Government are undertaking public consultation on a draft guide to implementing the EC habitats directive in the marine environment. Developed by a topic group of the Department of the Environment's coastal forum, the guide will be aimed at those authorities who would be responsible for setting up management schemes on sites covered by the EC habitats directive.

The draft document is also a guide to the regulations which implement the habitats directive in Great Britain—the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994. The guide sets out the legal obligations and duties with regard to European marine sites.

Like the habitats directive, the guide underlines the principle of sustainable development. The aim is to ensure that human activities are undertaken in ways that do not threaten the nature conservation interest and, wherever possible support it.

The guidance gives advice on the ways in which organisations responsible for aspects of the marine environment can work together to achieve conservation through co-operation. The importance of widespread consultation is also a principal theme in the draft guide.

Comments on the draft guidance are invited by 26 April 1996.

Development Plans

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the system of development plans prepared under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990; and if he will make a statement. [21193]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 13 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *620*.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce his decisions on the recommendations made to him by the Local Government Commission on 19 December 1995, following its review of the structure of 21 districts in England. [21404]

Mr. Gummer: I can now announce my decisions on the recommendations made by the Local Government Commission following its review of the structure of 21 districts. In reaching these decisions I have considered the commission's report and the representations which I have received. I have also take account of the estimates of transitional and on-going costs, and the viability of the structures which will result—both the unitary authorities and the remaining two-tier arrangements. In each case, I am satisfied that on balance my decision will best reflect the identities and interests of local communities and will best secure effective and convenient local government.

I am accepting the commission's recommendations that there should be no structural change in Basildon, Broxtowe, Dartford, Exeter, Gedling, Gloucester, Gravesham, Huntingdonshire, Northampton, Norwich, Rushcliffe and Spelthorne. I am satisfied that the case for a single tier of local government has been properly considered; I have no plans to direct the commission to carry out any further reviews of local government structure. Local authorities in all areas where there is no structural change now need to concentrate on developing and improving the delivery of services within the existing system. In most cases, local authorities have given undertakings on this; however, I shall not hesitate to intervene if it appears that those undertakings to work together are not being fulfilled.

The commission made recommendations for unitary authorities to be created in nine of the districts reviewed. I have decided to accept their recommendations for the reasons set out.

Blackburn

I have decided to accept the commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority for Blackburn.

As a former county borough it has a history of unitary local government. There is good evidence that Blackburn would operate effectively as a unitary authority. There is strong local identification with the two towns of Blackburn and Darwen within the borough, and support for unitary status. With a population of 138,300 the borough would be able to provide the full range of services, and its economic future could, I believe, be more effectively addressed by a strong unitary authority.

Blackpool

I also accept that Blackpool should be a unitary authority. It too is a former county borough. Its separate identity from the rest of Lancashire is well defined and is both local and national. Blackpool has clear and distinctive socio-economic problems, and tourism brings additional service pressure not shared by adjacent districts. Local residents identify strongly with the town. With a population of 152,100 it would be able to provide the full range of services. I have therefore concluded that a unitary authority would be viable and better able to address the needs and aspirations of local residents.

I am satisfied that, without Blackburn and Blackpool, Lancashire county council would be of sufficient size and strength to be viable, and to readjust its service provision to operate with no loss in cost-effectiveness.

Gillingham and Rochester upon Medway

In north-west Kent, I have concluded that the balance of evidence lies in favour of accepting the commission's recommendations; that there should be a joint unitary Gillingham and Rochester upon Medway but that Dartford and Gravesham should remain within the current structure of local government.

The case for joining the Medway towns in one unitary authority is strong. It is a significant urban area, one of the largest in the south-east outside London, with a population in excess of 240,000. The two boroughs form a continuous conurbation with strong cross-community interests and common physical and economic interests. Uniting the two authorities would provide a clearer focus and impetus to the Medway area and its size would ensure that the new authority would be well able to deliver the full range of local services. Kent county council would still be one of the largest county councils in England.

The commission, however, judged that on balance the case for Dartford and Gravesham was not so strong and had not been made out. It felt that the more diverse characters of the two districts along with the lack of wider support, particularly in Gravesham, would make a joint

unitary authority more difficult to establish. I strongly endorse the commission's conclusion that all the local authorities concerned should support and promote a development partnership for the area to manage change and growth. I shall not hesitate to intervene if it appears that those undertakings to work together are not being fulfilled.

Halton

I accept the commission's recommendation that Halton should become a unitary authority. It has an internal cohesion and a high level of self-sufficiency with most residents staying within the borough for shoping, work and leisure. It has a socio-economic profile more akin to that of neighbouring metropolitan areas and is quite distinct from the rest of the county. Both Runcorn as a new town and Widnes as a town expansion scheme have experienced substantial inward migration from Merseyside in the past 25 years, contributing to the relatively low level of community identity with Cheshire.

The authority is well placed to forge alliances and co-operative arrangements with neighbouring unitary authorities. There would be major advantages for Halton in being able to adopt a more locally focused approach to the co-ordination of services within an area which has a high level of deprivation and requires substantial regeneration.

Warrington

Also in Cheshire, I accept that Warrington should also become a unitary authority. As a large maturing new town, it has the size, with a population of 187,000, and the experience—as a county borough prior to 1974—to suggest that it would be well placed to deliver the full range of local authority services. It has grown rapidly since its designation as a new town, emphasising its separateness from the rest of Cheshire. Warrington itself is the main focus for the majority of residents in the borough.

I am satisfied that, without Halton and Warrington, Cheshire county council would remain of sufficient size, with a population of 665,300 to deliver county services. Without these two very urban and quite distinct areas, Cheshire county council would be able to focus more effectively on the remaining, more rural, county area.

Peterborough

I accept that Peterborough should become a unitary authority. The city area has a long history of being distinct from the rest of Cambridgeshire. It is also geographically marginal, situated on the edge of the county. It has a strategic importance with respect to communications, being situated on the main east coast railway link and on two major roads.

It is at the heart of an area covered by the greater Peterborough partnership, and is a major employment and retailing centre serving areas beyond the city. Its sphere of influence extends beyond the boundaries of the county. Peterborough has experienced rapid growth as a new town, and its highly urban character make it distinct from the rest of the county. It has the size, with 158,300 population on present boundaries, to be capable of delivering a full range of services, and unitary status would enable it to focus on its specific urban needs.

The remaining county would be more coherent without the highly urban Peterborough, and will be of sufficient size to be viable. It will, however, be important for the whole area that the county council and the unitary Peterborough address the issue of revised service arrangements, and that the existing economic development partnerships involving the various agencies, local authorities and the private sector are maintained, in order to maintain the quality of service delivery.

Thurrock

I have decided to accept the commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority for Thurrock. Thurrock has a community identity which is distinct from the rest of Essex. Its strategic importance extends beyond the county boundary, a result of its location on the periphery of London and the presence of the Lakeside complex. There is good support from residents and local organisations for change and, with a population of 131,000, I believe that Thurrock would be able to provide the full range of local government services.

I am satisfied that Essex—without Thurrock and Southend, which is also to become a unitary authority—would still be large enough for the county council to be a viable and cost-effective provider of services for the rest of the county.

The Wrekin

In Shropshire, I have decided that The Wrekin should become a unitary authority. It has a good case for unitary status on the grounds of both community identity and convenient and effective local government within the district.

The Wrekin has a character which is distinct from the rest of Shropshire, founded in its industrial history and the more recent development of Telford new town. The commission found that the district is largely self-contained for employment and leisure, that there are strong links between Telford and the rural part of the district, and that the population looks more towards the west midlands conurbation than to the rest of Shropshire.

I believe that unitary local government would help The Wrekin to develop its full potential as a major growth point for the west midlands. The benefits would extend beyond the authority's boundaries to the rest of the area. With a growing population, currently some 143,000, and a good infrastructure, I consider that a unitary council would be capable of delivering the full range of local authority services.

I am, however, mindful of the concerns which have been expressed about the impact of a unitary authority on the rest of Shropshire. I look to the new unitary authority to co-operate with Shropshire county council and the neighbouring districts to ensure that the economic and other benefits of unitary local government in The Wrekin are felt throughout the county.

Non-structural recommendations

Where I have accepted the commission's recommendations for structural change, I also propose to accept its recommendations for associated changes.

On strategic land use and planning, I accept the recommendations that the unitary authorities in Halton, Warrington and Thurrock should be enabled to prepare unitary development plans for their areas. I consider that unitary development plans offer the best way forward for the planning in these areas which are adjacent to metropolitan areas which already prepare unitary development plans.

In the other areas which will gain unitary status, I accept the commission's recommendation that the new unitary authorities should work jointly with the county council to maintain a joint structure plan for the combined area.

In these areas, the commission's recommendation provides for alternative approaches to minerals and waste local planning. It recommends that these planning responsibilities should be discharged through joint arrangements with the county council, but that the unitary authorities should be authorised to include such detailed policies in their local plans, if that would secure greater efficiency without prejudicing the county-wide strategic policy. Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 would enable joint arrangements to happen where they suit local circumstances. On the other hand, the joint structure plan wold include strategic policies for minerals and waste planning while the unitary authorities' local plans must be in general conformity with the structure plan; this would ensure that any detailed minerals and waste policies included in those local plans did not prejudice the jointly prepared strategic policies. I therefore accept both the alternative approaches. I agree that these recommendations offer the best way forward for planning in these areas.

I accept the commission's recommendations on the police, fire, probation and magistrates courts services in the unitary authorities.

The commission also made a number of recommendations for boundary and electoral changes. One, in the Basildon area, would have involved a particularly large transfer of population between Basildon, Brentwood and Rochford. This was first put forward in 1994 by the commission, following its review of Essex. Despite some local support, I consider that the proposals need further examination, especially with regard to the financial consequences. I am not satisfied that the commission was able to do this within the timing constraints on the district reviews. I therefore intend to direct the commission to look again at this matter, and at other boundaries in Essex, when it conducts its periodic electoral review of the county.

The commission also recommended a number of other smaller changes involving transfers of land between Huntingdonshire and Peterborough in the area of the southern township development. Given the southern township's strategic relationship with Peterborough, and the need to facilitate effective planning and service provision there, I am satisfied that this boundary change is desirable, and I accept the commission's recommended changes. I am also provisionally accepting the recommended changes to the warding in Peterborough, which reflect the proposed boundary change, although, as I mention below, I shall be directing the commission to carry out an electoral review of the city.

The recommended warding change in Gloucester city will rectify the under-representation in a number of the existing wards, and even out councillor to elector ratios; I accept this recommendation. The recommended boundary change in Surrey between Spelthorne and Runnymede districts takes account of changes in the course of the River Thames; former islands would be part of the district whose area they now join, thereby easing service delivery. I accept this recommendation also.

This concludes the commission's current review of the structure of local government in England, and I am grateful for its thorough and expeditious work. As I foreshadowed on 5 March, I shall be directing the commission to undertake immediate reviews of the electoral arrangements in the areas which will acquire unitary status as a result of my decisions today. Unlike the earlier county reviews, the commission did not have time in these district reviews to consider the electoral arrangements in detail. There remains considerable variation in the councillor to elector ratios in many of these areas, and I am concerned that suitable electoral arrangements are in place in time for all out elections to the unitary authorities.

We shall be consulting very shortly on draft orders to give effect to the decisions I have announced today, with a view to making the orders before the summer recess.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a list of all overseas visits make by all Ministers of his Department since 1990, including *(a)* details of the places visited and brief reasons for the visits, *(b)* details of the size, composition and cost to public funds of the delegation and *(c)* the names of non-ministerial members of each delegation and the capacity in which each was present.

[17485]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 1 March 1996]:* I have arranged for the available information about overseas visits to be placed in the Library. Providing the other information about other overseas visits that the hon. Member requests would involve disproportionate costs. I have assumed that the hon. Member does not include visits within the European Union in this category.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telecommunications (Key Escrow)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *229*, in respect of key escrow services, who constitutes the network of trusted third parties. [20466]

Mr. Ian Taylor: As stated in my previous answer, discussions are still taking place. Nevertheless, we would expect to see an international market demand for TTP services, and as such would envisage commercial organisations meeting them.

Employment Rights Legislation

Mr. Burden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those sections of the *(a)* Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, *(b)* Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and *(c)* Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993, the implementation of which are the responsibility of (i) the Department of Trade and Industry, (ii) the Department for Education and Employment and (iii) other Government Departments, specifying which. [20339]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I shall write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Energy from Waste Plants

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the study commissioned by his Department from the Water Research Council into the characteristics of ash from energy from waste plants; what advice he has received on the nature of this ash, and its place in the national waste classification system; if it is his Department's policy to support energy from waste plants; and if he will make a statement. [20462]

Mr. Page: The Department of Trade and Industry commissioned the Water Research Council to report on the properties and utilisation of municipal solid waste incineration residues, at a cost of £103,000. The report recommended that greatest effort should be given to the utilisation of bottom ash as secondary aggregate; an approach successfully employed in Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Ashes from the combustion of wood, coal and wastes are expected to be included in a new category in the third stage consultation on the waste classification scheme which the Department of the Environment will publish in April. Revenue from the beneficial use of bottom ash will help to improve the competitiveness of energy from waste projects which are supported by the non-fossil fuel obligation. Energy from waste projects also have the prospect of being developed outside the NFFO arrangements.

Post Offices

Mr. Connarty: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many conversions of Crown to agency status post offices *(a)* have been completed and *(b)* are proposed in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and each of the English regions; and if he will list the affected office in each case. [20394]

Mr. Oppenheim: I understand from the Post Office that the numbers of Crown post offices converted to agency status from March 1989 to the end of February 1996 by Post office Counters Ltd. regions are as follows:

	Number
Scotland	137
Northern Ireland	11
North East	82
North Wales and North West	105
Midlands	79
South Wales and South West	114
North Thames and East Anglia	159
South East	135

A list of these 822 offices could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I understand from the Post Office that the conversion to agency status of the following Crown post offices is currently proposed:

Scotland
Cambuslang

North Wales and North West
New Ferry

Farnworth

Denton

Glossop

North Thames and East Anglia
Southgate, London E14

Wood Street, London E17

Midlands
Shirley, Solihull

North East
Castleford

South Wales and South West
Devizes

Bodmin

Tewkesbury

South East
Portslade

Rochester

Trade Missions (Burma)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money has been allocated to funding trading missions to Burma; and if he will make a statement. [20393]

Mr. Oppenheim: The DTI has allocated £23,000 in the form of £1,000 grants to eligible UK companies which participated in the Asia Pacific advisory group trade mission to Burma between 26 February and 1 March 1996.

Exports (Burma)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his policy on the sale of goods to Burma. [20330]

Mr. Oppenheim: Except for the European Union defence embargo, there are no restraints on the export of goods to Burma.

Free Postage

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those persons and categories of persons who are entitled to free postage. [20522]

Mr. Oppenheim: Royal Mail provides free postage to registered blind people, visually impaired people and individuals or organisations posting certain items to blind or visually impaired people. This service allows packets containing articles which have been specially produced or adapted for blind or visually impaired people to be sent by first class post, free of charge. Some members of the royal family receive free postage to assist them in carrying out their public duties. Petitions and addresses to Her Majesty's the Queen and either House of Parliament can also be forwarded free of postage.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of Thursday 25 January, *Official Report*, columns *317–18*, what recent changes have been made to the list of members of the royal family and their households who receive free postage for their official mail. [20397]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* Since 1 March 1996 the Duchess of York and her staff have ceased to receive free postage.

Barnsley and Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what funds his Department has provided to the Barnsley and Doncaster TEC in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96; and what amount is planned for 1996–97. [20723]

Mr. Page: Barnsley and Doncaster TEC has received funding for the support of small and medium-sized businesses from numerous Government and European sources. The main DTI support is the enterprise budget which was £362,500 in 1994–95 and £294,000 in 1995–96 and is forecast to be £368,000 in 1996–97.

Company Sizes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many employees currently work in firms with *(a)* one to 10 employees, *(b)* 11 to 20 employees, *(c)* 21 to 50 employees, *(d)* 51 to 100 employees, *(e)* 101 to 200 employees, *(f)* 201 to 500 employees, *(g)* 501 to 1,000 employees, *(h)* 1,001 to 2,000 employees and (i) over 2,000 employees; how many firms fall into each of these categories; and what percentage of the total number of firms is covered by each of these categories. [20854]

Mr. Page: Figures are not available by these size classes. The most recent estimates of the number of firms by employee size class are shown in the table.

Table 1: Number of employees and businesses by size of business, end–1993

Size (Employees)	*Employees Number*	*Enterprises Number*	*Per cent.*
0	0	2,589,416	72.3
1–9	2,348,846	790,509	22.1
10–19	1,438,367	107,012	3.0
20–49	1,766,520	58,817	1.6
50–99	1,294,070	18,882	0.5
100–199	1,197,586	8,726	0.2
200–499	1,495,828	4,902	0.1
500+	7,530,115	3,205	0.1
All	17,071,332	3,581,469	100

Source:
DTI Small Firms Statistics Unit.

Technology Foresight Programme

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library the progress report on the technology foresight programme. [20588]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Yes. Today I have placed copies of the report in the Libraries of both Houses.

Petroleum Licensing

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will announce the licences for blocks under the seventh landward licensing round. [21190]

Mr. Page: Following my announcement to the House on 18 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *1210*, inviting applications under the seventh round of landward petroleum licensing, I am pleased to announce that the applications have now been assessed and I have decided to award 22 new licences for landward oil and gas exploration covering 74 blocks.

The majority of the awards are in the east midlands and Lincolnshire basin in which a number of oil and gas discoveries have been made over many years. Other awards have been made in less well-established areas including south Wales, Yorkshire and Humberside, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire.

New exploration concepts offered by companies in their applications should result in a significant increase in the exploration activity on land in Great Britain. A quarter of the applications were based on gas from coal and involve the exploitation of conventional coal bed methane, gob gas—gas collecting in old mines from de-stressed coals—and the gas which is currently vented to the atmosphere from abandoned mines for safety purposes.

I have tried to strike a balance in the wards across the round as a whole to ensure that both conventional and coal bed methane resources are thoroughly explored and that the optimum exploitation of hydrocarbon resources will result.

Some of the licences awarded are for blocks that straddle land and sea boundaries. I have decided to apply strict conditions in these cases to exclude any oil and gas

activity below the low-water mark. Activities above the low-water mark require planning permission which will take account of any environmental impact.

Although no near shore oil and gas activity has been licensed in this round, should interest be expressed in the watery areas in future licensing rounds, I will look again at the possibility of licensing them subject to satisfactory arrangements being put in place for protecting the interests of other users of the sea and the environment.

I was very impressed with the quality of the applications as well as their innovative and considered approach to oil and gas exploration and development. This is an encouraging outcome in the first landward petroleum licensing round to be held for three years. It is also the first landward round to allow companies to apply for the new unified petroleum exploration and development licence that covers the full life cycle of any hydrocarbon discovery.

Decisions about the awards were made on the basis of the technical work programmes offered by each applicant together with their evaluation of the exploration opportunities. I also took into account environmental and financial factors.

The onshore oil and gas industry has intended to be overshadowed by the huge successes in the North sea and now west of Shetland. Nevertheless, the onshore industry has a continuing and important role to play in the UK's energy sector, particularly in the light of the opportunities from the increasingly deregulated markets for gas and electricity. We also need the flexibility and freshness of approach that small companies bring to enhance the UK's ability to meet its energy needs.

These licence awards indicate the strong interest in petroleum exploration on land and underscore the broad range of licence opportunities available to the oil and gas industry across the whole of Great Britain and the United Kingdom continental shelf. I intend to build on this interest by holding landward rounds on a regular basis in future.

I will place copies of this announcement in the Libraries of both Houses.

Insolvency Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he met or spoke by telephone to the Deputy Prime Minister on 28 February to discuss whether the contracting out of Insolvency Service casework should proceed. [19580]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* Any discussions between Ministers are confidential.

Companies House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of market-testing and benchmarking exercises within Companies House; and if he will estimate the efficiency savings arising from such exercises. [20559]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 13 March 1996]:* It will not be possible to determine the costs and savings of the Companies House contracting-out programme until the programme has been completed.

Orimulsion

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will reconsider the approval of the importing and use of orimulsion for the purpose of electricity generation. [20370]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 13 March 1996]:* No. The choice of fuel to be used in a power station is a commercial matter for the company concerned subject to the operation of the station being able to satisfy the requirements of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases have been referred by Doncaster police to the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last four years; how many have been prosecuted; and how many have been successful. [19643]

The Attorney-General: Cases from the Doncaster police are dealt with by the South Yorkshire branch of the Crown Prosecution Service. That branch also deals with cases referred to it from other divisions of the South Yorkshire police force and, as statistics are kept on a branch basis only, it would not normally be possible to separate the figures for one police division from others serving the same branch. Exceptionally, I am able to provide figures for the last two calender years. Figures for the years 1992 and 1993 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The figures shown in the tables represent the number of cases received from the police and the number of defendants whose case proceeded to a hearing in magistrates courts and in the Crown court during the calendar years 1994 and 1995 and, of those, the proportion who were convicted. Convictions are inclusive of guilty pleas, as well as of contested hearings.

In the magistrates court, table 1 shows:

the number of defendants whose case was received by the CPS and the number whose case was finalised;

of defendants finalised, the number whose case was referred to the CPS for pre-charge advice, and the number of other, non-criminal, proceedings—such as forfeiture proceedings under the Obscene Publications Acts;

Table 2 shows:

defendants whose case was not proceeded with, divided into cases where the prosecution was dropped and cases which could not proceed and were written off—for example, because the defendant had died, or could not be traced.

Table 3 shows:

of those cases proceeded with, the number of: defendants bound over to keep the peace; defendants cases dealt with summarily by hearings in the magistrates court; defendants committed for trial to the Crown court; and defendants whose case was discharged at committal.

Table 4 shows:

of the cases heard in the magistrates court, the number of defendants convicted and the number acquitted. The sum of the two figures exceeds the number shown in table 3 for cases proceeding to a hearing because in cases where a defendant enters mixed pleas—guilty to some charges and not guilty to others—and is subsequently acquitted on those charges to which he pleaded not guilty, the Crown Prosecution Service counts the result as both a conviction and an acquittal or two convictions when the not guilty plea is proved. The same case may, therefore, count amongst the figures for convictions and those for acquittals.

In the Crown court, table 5 shows:

the number of defendants whose case was received and the number finalised. Of the number of defendants cases finalised, the number dealt with by way of appeal from the magistrates court or committed to the Crown court for sentence.

Table 6 shows:

of defendants' cases not proceeded with, divided into those in which no evidence was offered before the jury was sworn—prosecution dropped—and those which could not proceed and were written off—for example, because the defendant had died, could not be traced by the police or had been found unfit to plead.

Table 7 shows:

the number of defendants' cases proceeded with divided into the number bound over to keep the peace and the number heard in the Crown court.

Table 8 shows:

of the defendants' cases heard in the Crown court, the number which resulted in convictions and the number of acquittals. The sum of these figures is greater than the figure shown in table 7 for cases proceeding to a hearing for the same reason as set out above for cases in the magistrates court.

Table one: Magistrates Court

Case numbers

	Received	*Finalised*	*Of which Pre-charge advice*	*Per cent.*	*Other proceedings*	*Per cent.*
1994	9,368	9,105	1,182	13.0	26	0.3
1995	8,360	8,384	523	6.2	63	0.8

Table two: Not proceeded with of which

	Prosecution dropped	*Per cent.*	*Written off*	*Per cent.*
1994	1,003	12.7	390	4.9
1995	1,130	14.5	284	3.6

Table three: Proceeded with of which

	Bind over	*Per cent.*	*Hearings in the Magistrates' Court*	*Per cent.*	*Committed to Crown Court*	*Per cent.*	*Committal discharged*	*Per cent.*
1994	166	2.1	5,595	70.8	726	9.2	17	0.2
1995	187	2.4	5,557	71.3	633	8.1	7	0.1

Outcome of which...

	Convicted	*Per cent.*	*Acquitted*	*Per cent.*
1994	5,519	98.3	94	1.7
1995	5,462	98.1	104	1.9

Table five: Crown Court

	Receipts	*Finalised*	*of which Appeals and committals for sentence*	*Per cent.*
1994	936	869	122	14.0
1995	780	878	131	14.9

Table six: Not proceeded with of which...

	Prosecution dropped	*Per cent.*	*Written off*	*Per cent.*
1994	46	6.2	0	0.0
1995	78	10.4	0	0.0

Table seven: proceeded with of which...

	Bind over	*Per cent.*	*Hearings*	*Per cent.*
1994	9	1.2	692	92.6
1995	27	3.6	642	85.9

Table eight: outcome of which...

	Convicted	*Per cent.*	*Acquitted*	*Per cent.*
1994	696	96.0	29	4.0
1995	636	95.6	29	4.4

HOME DEPARTMENT

Identity Cards

5. **Mr. Renton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in favour of the introduction of a compulsory British identity card. [18986]

Mr. Howard: Of over 3,000 responses we received to the Green Paper on identity cards, 1,700 were in favour of the introduction of an identity card and of these 800 favoured a compulsory card.

Prison Service

14. **Ms Janet Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the study commissioned by his Department into relations between the Home Office and the Prison Service. [18995]

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Member is referring to the in-depth study recommended by General Sir John Learmont. As my right hon and learned Friend told the House on 16 October, *Official Report*, columns 30–44, we have set work in hand in response to this recommendation. The work was assisted initially by Miss Kate Jenkins and then taken forward by discussions between Prison Service and Home Office officials—but no in-depth study as recommended by Sir John Learmont has been commissioned. We have had a number of general inquiries in connection with this but no representations as

such. My right hon. and learned Friend has undertaken to give a full response to the Learmont recommendations in due course and this remains the position.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

15. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes currently operate in Leicestershire; what was the figure five years ago; and if he will make a statement. [18996]

Mr. Maclean: There are currently 2,701 neighbourhood watch schemes in Leicestershire. At the end of December 1990 there were 1,245. This is an increase of 116 per cent. In Leicestershire, as in the rest of the country, more and more people are realising the benefits of neighbourhood and street watch.

Trials

16. **Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to improve trials. [18997]

Mr. Maclean: The Government have introduced a number of initiatives to improve the way in which the criminal justice system operates. The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill, currently before the House, contains measures which will further improve the preparation of cases and the conduct of criminal trials.

New Technology Developments (Funding)

17. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to fund developments in new technology. [18998]

Mr. Maclean: New technology developments are funded directly by public capital provision, or indirectly through grant and credit approvals, or the private finance initiative and challenge funding, such as the closed circuit television initiative.

Cautions

18. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy relating to cautions. [18999]

Mr. Maclean: Cautioning should continue to be used, but only where it is an adequate response to the particular circumstances of the offence and of the offender.

Fire Service College

20. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the financial deficit shown in the annual report and accounts of the Fire Service College. [19002]

Mr. Sackville: The Fire Service College's accounts for 1994–95 show cumulative deficit of over £7 million. The intention is that the college should continue as a trading fund. A number of measures have already been taken or are under active consideration which are intended to strengthen the college's financial position and to secure its place as the central provider of both command and specialist training for the UK fire service.

Persistent Criminals

21. **Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policies he has to deal with persistent burglars and drug pushers. [19003]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend announced last October proposals which would require courts to impose stiff minimum prison sentences on persistent burglars and drug dealers. I will be publishing a White Paper shortly setting out full details of these proposals.

Policemen on the Beat

22. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of policemen on the beat. [19004]

Mr. Maclean: Police officers on the beat are crucial to the fight against crime which is why there is a national objective for high visibility policing. Patrol work, properly directed and targeted, is an effective tool in increasing community safety.

Policing (East Sussex)

23. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve policing in East Sussex. [19006]

Mr. Maclean: The chief constable of Sussex police is responsible for policing East Sussex. The Sussex police authority's budget this year increased by 16 per cent.—or £20.2 million—over 1994–95. The force have said that total police strength should increase by 130 in 1995–96. Spending will increase by a further £5.6 million or 3.9 per cent. in 1996–97.

Knives and Imitation Guns

24. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to control the sale of offensive knives and imitation guns. [19007]

Mr. Maclean: An amendment dealing with the sale of knives and other items was accepted during Committee stage of the Offensive Weapons Bill on Wednesday 6 March. The effect of the amendment is to make it an offence to sell to someone under the age of 16 any knife, knife blade—or razor blade—any axe or any other article which has a blade or which is sharply pointed and which is made or adapted to cause injury to another person.

Any imitation firearm which can be readily converted to fire live ammunition is subject to stringent licensing control. Licensing the sale of possession of other imitation firearms would be neither feasible nor effective in combating misuse.

Fire Stations (Docklands)

25. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment of the increased risk to life and property in the docklands area of London consequent on the proposals to reduce the number of appliances in fire stations covering that area. [19008]

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for making any such assessment rests with the London fire and civil defence authority. If an application is received from the authority to remove appliances from the docklands area, my right hon. and learned Friend will take advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services on whether the nationally recommended standards of fire cover will be maintained.

Social Security Officers (Police Co-operation)

26. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many chief constables have reported the non-co-operation of local social security officers when asked by the police for addresses for serving warrants for arrest. [19009]

Mr. Maclean: I have received no reports of any difficulties.

Crime Prevention (South-west)

27. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support he has given for crime prevention initiatives in the south-west. [19010]

Mr. Maclean: We support crime prevention initiatives nationally in several ways, for example by encouraging the formation of neighbourhood watch and other watch schemes, and by our support for crime concern.

In the south-west in particular, a safer cities project was established in Bristol as part of phase 1 of the safer cities programme, while there is a project at Plymouth under phase 2. There is also a drugs prevention initiative team working in Avon and Somerset, delivering a programme of work which involves local people. There were 14 successful bids from the south-west in the first round of the closed circuit television challenge competition, worth over £450,000.

Public Bodies

28. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he uses in deciding appointments to public bodies for which he has responsibility. [19011]

Mr. Howard: My appointments to public bodies are governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit, taking account of the skills and experience needed by the bodies concerned.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base, and which *(a)* publish their advice to Government, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20097]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* The following advisory non-departmental bodies which are sponsored by my Department:

(i) *are on a statutory basis*

Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs
Animals Procedures Committee
Boards of Visitors, prison establishments
Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council
Firearms Consultative Committee
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales
Parole Board
Poisons Board
Police Negotiating Board

(ii) *publish their advice to Government*

Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs[1]
Animals Procedures Committee
Firearms Consultative Committee[1]
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England[1]
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales[1]
Poisons Board[1]

(iii) *publish an annual report and lay it before Parliament*

Animals Procedures Committee[1]
Firearms Consultative Committee[1]
Metropolitan Police Committee
Parole Board[1]

In addition, boards of visitors may at the discretion of each board publish their annual reports.

[1] In these cases, the bodies concerned meet a statutory requirement. In other cases, the bodies act voluntarily.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings (i) under a statutory requirement and (ii) voluntarily. [20114]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* The following advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department:

(i) hold public meetings

Metropolitan Police Committee
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales

(ii) conduct public consultative exercises

Animals Procedures Committee
Firearms Consultative Committee
Metropolitan Police Committee
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales

(iii) conduct consultative exercises with outside commercial interests

Animals Procedures Committee
Crime Prevention Agency Board
Firearms Consultative Committee
Metropolitan Police Committee

The activities listed are undertaken voluntarily by the bodies concerned except for the parliamentary Boundary Commissions which are statutorily required to hold local inquiries in public if certain conditions are met and also to conduct public consultation exercises.

None of the advisory non-departmental public bodies which my Department sponsors publishes a register of members' interests, agendas for meetings or minutes of meetings.

Prisons (Government Policy)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the 1991 White Paper on prisons represents Government policy on prisons. [19001]

Miss Widdecombe: Both the 1991 White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice" and the Woolf report which preceded it, identified the need for a proper balance between essential security measures and effective, constructive regime activities. This remains Prison Service policy today. We have already implemented most of the White Paper commitments.

Public Interest Immunity

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his predecessor signed a public interest immunity certificate in the case of R *v.* Roche, and others, at Plymouth Crown court in July and August 1991. [18812]

Mr. Howard: No public interest immunity certificate was issued by the then Home Secretary in this case.

Prison Service (Director General)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people *(a)* applied for and *(b)* were approached to apply for the post of Director General of the Prison Service when it was vacated by Mr. Derek Lewis. [19835]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on 26 February, *Official Report*, column *417*.

Executive Action

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those areas of executive action other than citizenship where he has discretion to act in respect of an individual without giving reasons for this decision. [20074]

Mr. Howard: Comprehensive records are not kept in the form requested, but no provision comparable to that in section 44(2) of the British Nationality Act 1981 has been identified from readily available sources.

Fire Services (Wales)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each financial year from 1990–91 to 1996–97 the finances made available for each fire brigade in Wales in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms and the sources from which this funding came. [20273]

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for the revenue funding of Welsh local authorities. Welsh local government revenue settlement resources are not hypothecated to specific services such as fire. Funding for fire authorities' revenue services is an integral part of local authorities budget setting. Returns from local authorities showing expenditure on fire have been placed in the Library. No information is available yet for 1996–97.

Convictions

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of cases brought to court secured convictions *(a)* 20 years ago, *(b)* 10 years ago and *(c)* in each of the last five years. [20346]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table:

Offenders convicted at all courts as a percentage of prosecutions at magistrates courts by type of offence 1974, 1984, 1990–94

England and Wales — *Percentages*

	Type of Offence			
	Indictable	*Summary non motoring*	*Summary motoring*	*All offences*
1974	92	92	96	94
1984	86	89	92	90
1990	73	81	83	80
1991	69	79	80	77
1992	66	78	77	75
1993	64	78	74	73
1994	63	77	74	72

Cyclists (Pedestrian Injuries)

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of serious incidents and injuries caused to pedestrians by people who ride their bicycles on the pavements; what plans he has to address this problem; and if he will make a statement. [20388]

Mr. Maclean: Personal injury road accident data are recorded by the Department of Transport. No estimates are available of the number of accidents between cyclists and pedestrians on pavements. The following table shows the total number of injury accidents on public roads reported to the police in 1994 which involved a pedal cyclist and one or more pedestrians. It is not possible to estimate the proportion of these accidents which occurred on the pavement.

Injury accidents involving one pedal cyclist and one or more pedestrians

Number of accidents 333 — *Great Britain 1994*

	Killed	*Seriously injured*	*Slightly injured*	*Total casualties*
Casualties resulting:				
Pedestrian casualties	3	95	241	339
Pedal cyclists casualties	0	14	68	82

The manner in which enforcement of the offence of cycling on the pavement is carried out, including the allocation of resources for the purpose, is a matter for individual chief officers of police. The Home Office intends soon to seek views on whether cycling on the pavement should be made a fixed penalty offence.

By the use of publicity campaigns, such as "cycle safe", the Department of Transport will continue its efforts to remind cyclists that they should adopt a responsible attitude and comply with the law and with normal standards of common sense and courtesy to others.

Funerals

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which is the lead Department on the funeral industry; and what consideration is being given to amending relevant legislation, along lines suggested by the National Funerals College executive director, the Reverend Doctor Peter Jupp, for the re-use of graves after a period of years. [19172]

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Trade and Industry are responsible for consumers' interests in goods and services provided by the funerals industry, while the Home Office is responsible for the law relating to burial and certain related matters. There are no present plans to amend legislation to provide for the proposed re-use of graves.

Crime Statistics (Essex)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the level of recorded crime in Essex; and what was the level two years ago. [19199]

Mr. Maclean: The police in Essex recorded 101,687 offences in the 12 months to June 1995 and 115,895 offences in the 12 months to June 1993, a fall of 14,208 offences.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of CCTV in tackling crime. [19240]

Mr. Maclean: Police operational experience and independent research show that closed circuit television can have a significant impact in reducing crime and the fear of crime. CCTV prevents crime happening in the first place; it aids the investigation and detection of crime; and it provides evidence to help convict the guilty.

We are making £45 million available to promote the use of CCTV technology in the fight against crime with the aim of providing 10,000 new cameras over the next three years.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is currently the waiting time for those applying for an oral hearing by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; [20639]

(2) how many cases are currently awaiting an oral hearing by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; and what was the number at 1 March 1995; [20638]

(3) what steps he is taking to reduce the waiting time for those applying for an oral hearing by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. [20637]

Mr. Maclean: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board advises that the average waiting time for an oral hearing is currently 14 months, although almost 50 per cent. of applications for, or referrals to, a hearing are resolved within 12 months.

The number of appeals cases awaiting resolution rose from some 18,000 on 1 March 1995 to 22,800 on 1 March 1996 by reason of the significant increase in the volume of initial decisions issued—93,000—since the first tariff scheme was withdrawn on 5 April 1995, requiring all the previous year's applications to be reprocessed.

The board has expanded its hearing programme to meet this demand and, at the request of its chairman, Lord Carlisle QC, my right hon. and learned Friend recently made additional appointments to the board for this purpose. From 1 April 1996, under the new tariff scheme approved by Parliament in December, there are procedures designed to help contain the number of cases where such hearings are necessary and to enable cases which do require a hearing to be resolved more quickly.

PROMIS Project

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the costs to date to his Department for the tendering exercise for financial reporting software for the PROMIS project; [19674]

(2) if the companies that withdrew from the tendering process for the PROMIS project will now be invited to resubmit their tenders; [19675]

(3) at what stage in the tendering process his Department will ensure that all companies are able to meet the mandatory requirements for the PROMIS project. [19676]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The recent PROMIS procurement exercise designed to obtain a comprehensive information technology solution to support the Home Office's purchasing and supply function was halted because no compliant solutions were put forward.

The Home Office has no plans to invite further tenders to meet the full PROMIS requirement.

The total cost of the procurement exercise to the Home Office is approximately £160,000.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20481]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* Information about the values of payments outstanding is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

Rail Track (Speed Restrictions)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of rail track are currently subject to speed restrictions on each major line throughout the rail network. [19859]

Mr. Watts: The current number of miles subject to speed restrictions on each of the major lines are:

West coast main line: 11

Midland main line: 2.5

East coast main line: 3

Great western: 50.5

Car Ferries

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those ferries currently operating to and from United Kingdom ports which *(a)* meet and *(b)* do not meet the requirements of the proposed regional agreement relating to car deck bulkheads, indicating in each case in *(b)* when he expects the standards to be reached. [19871]

Mr. Norris: The Government, in their response to the Transport Committee's report on cross-channel safety, had already undertaken to publish such a list, and subsequent updated lists, once agreement was reached on the implementation of a higher ferry survivability standard. Such an agreement has now been reached and a list indicating in each case when we expect the standard to be reached will be published after detailed calculations have been completed.

Trunk Road Network

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department received the local authority associations' submission on the case for the transfer of responsibility for much of the trunk road network to local authorities; and when he intends to respond to it. [19770]

Mr. Watts: The local authority associations tabled a paper setting out their proposals for transferring a significant proportion of the all-purpose trunk road network to local authorities for discussion at the national annual consultative meeting on 18 July 1995, when we discussed a possible way forward based on a case study approach. The associations' proposals are currently being considered in the context of the national transport debate; they were discussed further with the associations at the local transport liaison group meeting on 30 January.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what uniform business rate income the Exchequer will derive from Railtrack when the company has been privatised; how this income will be shared among local authorities; and if the payment of uniform business rate by Railtrack has been included in the calculation of track access charges. [19862]

Mr. Watts: Rateable values for Railtrack's operational property are prescribed by orders by the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Scotland and for Wales. The sum raised from this in 1994–95 was £91.7 million. Other properties are assessed in the normal way by the Valuation Office agency and the moneys collected by the relevant local authorities. The figure for this is not held centrally. These arrangements will be unaffected by privatisation. All non-domestic rates, whether collected by the Secretaries of State or by local authorities, are paid into the non-domestic rating pools for the respective countries and redistributed to local authorities on a per capita basis. The payment of rates is included in Railtrack's costs which were taken into account by the Rail Regulator in setting the level of access charges.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when each remaining part of the former British Rail is due to be privatised. [19863]

Mr. Watts: The timetable for franchising and future sales is set down in the following table. This gives indications only of when sales are expected to be completed or franchises awarded.

(a) *Franchises*

The Franchising Director is responsible for awarding franchising contracts.

Bidders were shortlisted for InterCity East Coast, Midland Main Line, Network SouthCentral and Gatwick Express on 16 January. The Franchising Director received final bids on 1 March for InterCity East Coast, Midland Main Line and Gatwick Express. Final bids for Network SouthCentral were required by 11 March 1996.

The Franchising Director is inviting the shortlisted bidders (with the exception of Enterprise Rail) to re-tender for LTS Rail.

Invitations to tender for South Eastern were issued on 19 December 1995 and for Chiltern on 30 January. Indicative bids for both are required by 22 March.

Invitations to pre-qualify for Cardiff and South Wales and West were issued on 23 January. 19 applications have been received for pre-qualification, the majority of companies being interested in pre-qualifying for both franchises.

Invitations to pre-qualify for Anglia and Thames Trains were issued on 22 February. Applications must be received by 22 March.

Invitations to tender for the remaining franchises will be issued in due course.

(b) *Freight Businesses*

Final bids for Freightliner were invited on 22 December 1995. BR aims to complete the sale in the coming months.

The Government and British Rail are examining the options for privatisation of Railfreight Distribution.

(c) *Infrastructure companies*

Final bids for the following businesses were involved on 5 October 1995 and the sales are expected in the coming months:

Western Track Renewals Co. Ltd.

Northern Infrastructure Maintenance Co. Ltd.

Northern Track Renewals Co. Ltd.

Eastern Infrastructure Maintenance Co. Ltd.

Eastern Track Renewals Co. Ltd.

Southern Track Renewals Co. Ltd.

South West Infrastructure Maintenance Co. Ltd.

South East Infrastructure Maintenance Co. Ltd.

(d) *Other BR Businesses*

Final bids for the following units were invited:

The engineering link: 15 December 1995

Interfleet Technology: 15 December 1995

Network Train Engineering Services: 15 December 1995

College of Railway Technology: 26 January 1996.

Bids are currently being considered for the above units and for BR Projects Ltd.

Indicative bids will be invited for about 10 other Central Services units. BR expects to dispose of all the above units over the coming months.

(e) *Railtrack*

The Government intend to sell Railtrack by stock market flotation in May 1996.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if

he will list each part of the former British Rail which has been privatised since the passage of the Railways Act 1993, indicating the income generated by each sale. [19864]

Mr. Watts: The tables list those parts of British Rail which have either been sold or franchised.

The first two franchises were awarded as contracts to run services in return for the payment of grant and will not generate receipts for the Government.

Gross proceeds from the sales to date of businesses sold by BR amount to some £571.5 million. As explained in the Government's response of 14 December 1995 to the Transport Select Committee Fourth Report, on railway finances, it would be contrary to the commercial interests of British Rail and the Government to publish details of individual sales at this stage, as that may prejudice sales still in progress. Details of individual sales completed will be made public in due course.

In addition to that figure, the sale of the rolling stock leasing companies, which was handled by my Department, realised £1,822 million; that figure comprises £598 million for Eversholt Leasing Ltd., £528 million for Porterbrook Leasing Ltd. and £696 million for Angel Train Contracts Ltd.

Franchises

	Awarded
Great Western Holdings Ltd.	20 December 1995
Stagecoach Holdings plc Ltd.	19 December 1995

Both commenced operations on 4 February 1996.

Companies sold	*As at 14 March 1996*
Freight and Parcels	
Red Star	Sold 5 September 1995
Rail express systems Ltd.	Sold 9 December 1995
Trainload Freight businesses	Sold 4 February 1996
Loadhaul Freight Ltd.	
Mainline Freight Ltd.	
Transrail Freight Ltd.	
Rolling stock leasing companies	
Porterbrook Leasing Ltd.	Sale completed 8 January 1996
Angel Train Contracts Ltd.	Sale completed 17 January 1996
Eversholt Leasing Ltd.	Sale completed 2 February 1996
Other Businesses	
Special Trains Unit	Sale completed 31 March 1995
BRIS Design Offices	
DCU Birmingham	Sold 25 July 1995
Mainline Swindon	Sold 18 August 1995
IDG Glasgow	Sold 18 August 1995
BPE Mechanical and Engineering Consultancy, Doncaster	Sold 15 September 1995
Civil Engineering Design Group, York	Sold 15 September 1995
Powertrack Engineering Company Limited	Sold 15 December
CEDAC London Limited	

Companies sold	*As at 14 March 1996*
BR Maintenance Ltd.	
Swindon Electronic Service Centre	Sold 11 April 1995
Chart Leacon (Ashford)	Sold 5 June 1995
Ilford and Doncaster Depots	
Wolverton, and Springburn (Glasgow) Depots	Sold 6 June 1995
Eastleigh Depot	Sold 7 June 1995
BR Telecommunications Ltd.	Sale completed 21 December 1995
BR Central Services	
Meldon Quarry Ltd.	Sold February 1994
Baileyfield Switches and Crossings Works	Sold 7 July 1995
Ditton Timber Treatment Works	Sold 1 September 1995
Quality and Safety Services Ltd.	Sold 10 November 1995
Railways Occupational Health Ltd.	Sold 30 November 1995
Signalling Control (UK) Ltd.	Sold 1 December 1995
Interlogic Control Engineering Ltd.	Sold 4 January 1996
Castleton Long Welded Rail and Track Works	Sold 14 March 1996
OBS Services Ltd.	Sold 3 October 1995
BR Infrastructure Companies	
Scotland Track Renewals Co. Ltd.	Sold 8 February 1996
Scotland Infrastructure Maintenance Co. Ltd.	Sold 14 February 1996
Western Infrastructure Maintenance Co. Ltd.	Contracts exchanged 7 March 1996
Central Infrastructure Maintenance Co. Ltd.	Contracts exchanged 7 March 1996

Railway Lands (London)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of the King's Cross railway lands; and what value was attached to the asset. [20305]

Mr. Watts: A valuation of the King's Cross railway lands was carried out for the British Rail Property Board in March 1995. Based on rental income derived from the lands, the existing use value was estimated to be £5.8 million. A valuation was carried out for my Department in November 1995 to assess the development value of those parts of the King's Cross railway lands not ultimately required for the channel tunnel rail link operational railway which indicated a development value of up to £10.6 million.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the last valuation was made of the railway land at Stratford now transferred to London and Continental Railways; and what value was attached to it. [20306]

Mr. Watts: A valuation of the Stratford railway lands, including the land required for the channel tunnel rail link and Stratford international station, was carried out for the British Rail Property Board in March 1995. Based on rental income derived from the lands, the existing use value was estimated to be £15.2 million. A valuation was carried out for my Department in May 1995 to assess the development value of the lands excluding those parts required for the CTRL operational railway, which indicated a development value of up to £12.5 million.

Railway Costs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the operating cost per mile including overheads, maintenance and security of *(a)* an InterCity train, *(b)* a Network SouthEast commuter train and *(c)* a North West Regional Railways train. [20308]

Mr. Watts: The 1994–95 operating expenses per train mile were:

InterCity: £27.67

Network SouthEast: £21.13

Regional Railways: £14.37

Figures are not directly comparable with previous years due to reorganisation of the industry under the Railways Act 1993. The operating expense per train mile specific to North West Regional Railways is not available.

Royal Train

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *482*, relating to the use of the royal train, what definition is used of a public duty. [20471]

Mr. Watts: The definition is a duty undertaken to mark a public event or occasion.

Marine Accidents (Pilots)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vessels have run aground *(a)* with a pilot and *(b)* without a pilot on board in each year since 1987. [20521]

Mr. Norris: The statistics requested are not available.

Highways Agency

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost of the review of the organisation and staffing of the Highways Agency announced to staff in November 1995. [20782]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Clare Short, dated 14 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the cost of the review of the organisation and staffing of the Highways Agency announced to staff in November 1995.

The internal review team estimate their costs at about £110,000. No external consultancy costs have been incurred.

"Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas"

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those recommendations contained in Lord Donaldson's report, by reference to the particular chapter and paragraph, which *(a)* have been implemented in full, *(b)* are in the process of being implemented in full, *(c)* are planned to be only partially implemented and *(d)* will not be implemented. [20819]

Mr. Norris: Lord Donaldson's report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas", Cm 2560, contains 103 recommendations, which are listed in chapter 23. The Government have accepted 91 of these, are considering a further eight, and have rejected four. The position on each recommendation is summarised in the table.

Position	*Recommendations (as number in chapter 23 of Lord Donaldson's report)*
Accepted: Implemented in full	2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 24, 26–29, 32, 37, 38, 41, 46–48, 78, 79, 81, 82, 84 88, 90, 91, 94, 99, 100
Accepted: Implementation on-going[1]	1, 4, 5, 7, 13, 16, 18–20, 23, 25, 30, 31, 33–35, 39, 44, 45, 49, 50–58, 61–69, 70–77, 80, 83, 86, 87, 89, 93, 97, 98, 101–103
Under consideration	12, 40, 42, 59, 85, 92, 95, 96
Rejected	9, 36, 43, 60

[1] The final extent of implementation of some of these recommendations will depend on a number of factors.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to implement in full the recommendation contained paragraph 127 in chapter 20 of Lord Donaldson's report published in May 1994. [20817]

Mr. Norris: The Government have provided dedicated emergency tugs at Dover and Stornoway—two of the three key areas identified in paragraph 127—both last winter and this winter. In deciding future deployment, we will take into account experience of providing these tugs, of liaison arrangements with tug operators, and of any relevant findings of the investigations into the Sea Empress incident.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers exist to him to reject a scheme for the proposed Central Railway rail link from the channel tunnel to the midlands following a public inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [20598]

Mr. Watts: The relevant powers are contained in section 13 of the Transport and Works Act 1992. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can make the order, with or without modifications, or not make the order. Where an application has been referred to Parliament as a scheme of national significance, the power to make the order is exercisable only if both Houses of Parliament have passed resolutions approving the proposals, but such resolutions would not affect his power not to make the order. He would make a decision only after having taken into account the inspector's conclusions and recommendation following a subsequent public inquiry.

Sea Empress

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the full terms of reference given to the marine accident investigation branch into the Sea Empress disaster. [20818]

Mr. Norris: Individual marine accident investigation branch investigations do not have distinct terms of reference. The purpose of such investigations, as set out in regulations, is to determine the circumstances and causes of

accidents with the aim of improving the safety of life at sea and the avoidance of accidents in future. The regulations also provide that an investigation may extend to cover all events and circumstances preceding the accident which in the opinion of the inspector may have been relevant to its cause or outcome, and also to cover the consequences of the accident. I understand that the chief inspector intends that the Sea Empress investigation will be comprehensive and will cover, among other matters, the initial grounding, the availability of salvage tugs, the question of double hulls, the safety of port operations and the effects, if any, current salvage law may have had on the conduct of the salvage operation. Indeed, the inspector will consider all evidence and arguments submitted to him which have a bearing on the cause of the original grounding of the Sea Empress and the conduct of the salvage operation.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which recommendations were included in the interim findings of the marine accident investigation branch Sea Empress investigation. [20763]

Mr. Norris: None.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the salvage tugs which were offered to those managing the Sea Empress salvage operation between Thursday 15 February and Wednesday 21 February and their individual maximum bollard pull; [20810]

(2) if he will list each type of dispersant and the quantity used in aerial spraying to disperse oil from the Sea Empress; [20762]

(3) if he will list the products and techniques for cleaning up oil spillages on the shore which his Department has evaluated and tested in the last five years; [20807]

(4) if he will list the tugs used on the attempts to salvage the Sea Empress; and who owned them; [20816]

(5) which specialised vessels suitable for collecting spilled oil from the surface of the sea were offered to the marine pollution control unit on or after 15 February to assist with the Sea Empress operation; and which vessels were chartered; [20812]

(6) if he will list those products and techniques for cleaning oil from the shore, the development of which has been financially supported by his Department in the last five years. [20806]

Mr. Norris: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 14 March 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about oil spill clean up and salvage tugs in the Sea Empress incident.

PQ 1460/95/96

The Coastguard Emergency Towing Vessel at Stornoway, SMIT LLOYD SAFE, 125 tonnes, was offered to the salvors. In addition the salvors considered a number of other tugs. Which tugs these were, and whether they were offered or sought, is now a matter for the Marine Accident Investigation Branch investigation to determine.

PQ 1463/95/96

The information is a s follows:

	Tonnes
Finasol OSR-51	212
Slickgone LTSW	97
Slickgone NS	53
Dispolene 34S	31
Corexit 9500	8
Enersperse 1583	13.5
Superdispersant 25	31
Demulsifier (Surdyne mixed with Shell LA)	8

PO's 1467 and 1474/95/96

The MPCU has in recent years commissioned a number of research projects examining different techniques for dealing with oil pollution on different shoreline types. Initially sandy shorelines were examined (1986) and the methods used at Tenby and Saundersfoot during the recent Sea Empress incident were based on the findings of this project. Later MPCU projects examined and reviewed clean-up techniques for shingle (1989), rocky shorelines (1992) and mudflats and saltmarshes (1993). Within these projects, a number of clean-up tools and products were evaluated and tested, including vehicles, beach-cleaning machines, beach washing plant and cleaning agents. Beach load-bearing characteristics were also evaluated.

The results of much of this research have been disseminated to local authorities by way of MPCU residential training courses, MPCU Scientific, Technical and Operational Advice Notes (Stop Notices), and a technical manual entitled 'Oil Spill Clean-Up of the Coastline'.

MPCU has also funded an evaluation study (1993) into the use of sorbent products as a tool for clean-up (final polishing of shingle/pebble beaches) and it is intended to develop a protocol for testing sorbent use and effectiveness. Work has also been commissioned on bioremediation. A State of the Art Report (1994) has been produced and research is ongoing.

PQ 1469/95/96

Dalegarth, Thorngath, Stackgarth, Tito Neri } Cory Towage Ltd. Milford Haven

Portgarth: Cory Towage Ltd., Avonmouth

Yewgarth Cory Towage Ltd., Liverpool

Eldergarth Cory Towage Ltd., Liverpool

Eskgarth: Irish Tugs Ltd.

Anglian Duke Klyne Tugs, Lowestoft

Anglian Earl Klyne Tugs, Lowestoft

Vanguard: Carmet Towing, Liverpool

Alfred: Howard Smith, Swansea

Arild Viking: Arild Viking AS; Viking Supply AS; Norway

De Yue: Fairmount, Rotterdam

Vikingbank Smit Tak, Rotterdam

Smit Orca Smit Tak, Rotterdam

PQ 1471/95/96

Seven vessels suitable for recovering spilled oil from the surface of the sea were offered to the Marine Pollution Control Unit, of which six were accepted. The remaining offer was not needed. The details are as follows:

Vessel	*Status*	*Comment*
Rijn Delta	Accepted	Dutch
Small AGT	Accepted	Dutch
Ailette	Accepted	French
Elan	Accepted	French
NOFO' oil recovery vessel	Declined	Not required
Forth Explorer	Accepted	UK
Sefton Supporter	Accepted	UK

[1] Norwegian Clean Seas Association for Operating Companies. In addition to those vessels offered, the MPCU chartered the Gordon Thomas, and hired three small oil recovery craft. Two specialised oil recovery vessels belonging to Milford Haven Port Authority were also used.

Marine Accidents (Reports)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many investigations carried out by the marine accident investigation branch have included publication of interim findings; and if he will list those investigations. [20795]

Mr. Norris: Interim findings have been published in connection with four investigations:

Lunohods—1/Borodinskoe Pole
Antares/HMS Trenchant
Wilhelmina J/Zulfikar
Sea Empress

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those investigations carried out by the marine accident investigation branch which have had their reports published; and which of those reports included criticisms of *(a)* Ministers of the Crown, *(b)* the Department of Transport and *(c)* agencies of his Department. [10820]

Mr. Norris: Marine accident investigation branch published reports are as follows:

Bowsprite
Grey Flamingo
Marchioness/Bowbelle
Earl Granville
Mobil Petrel
Majestic
Premier
RMS Titanic (reappraisal of evidence relating to SS Californian)
Irving Forest
MFV Margaret and William II
Antares/HMS Trenchant
Ocean Hound
Wilhelmina J/Zulfikar
Esso Mersey
Queen Elizabeth 2
MV Norsea
Braer
Havkong (jointly with Health and Safety Executive)
MV Hoegh Duke
British Trent/Western Winner
Sally Star
Heather Bloom

(a) None.

(b) The report of the collision between the Marchioness and the Bowbelle and the report of the lifeboat accident on the Norsea included criticisms of the Marine Directorate of the Department of Transport, now the Marine Safety Agency. The report of the Braer stranding including criticism of HM Coastguard, now the Coastguard agency.

(c) None.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of *(a)* the marine accident investigation branch investigation into the Braer disaster and *(b)* Lord Donaldson's inquiry and report into matters relating to the Braer disaster. [20815]

Mr. Norris: Total costs of the MAIB investigation are not known, but the staff costs of the three inspectors involved amounted to £23,000.

Lord Donaldson's inquiry did not specifically relate to the Braer. The inquiry was set up to consider the wider issue of the prevention of pollution from merchant shipping. The costs of Lord Donaldson's inquiry amounted to £390,000.

Milford Haven Port Authority

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the present membership of the Milford Haven port authority and in each case by whom they were appointed; which companies or organisations they represent; in which county they live; when their office will terminate; and what is their remuneration. [20811]

Mr. Norris: The constitution of the Milford Haven port authority provides for the Secretary of State to appoint the chairman and eight or nine other members. One of these has to be appointed after consultation with representatives of organised labour in Wales—in practice the Wales Trade Union Congress—two after consultation with local authorities and two after consultation with the oil industry. The remainder must have wide experience of and have shown capacity in shipping, commercial and financial matters, and so on, as set out in the constitution. The general manager is appointed as an ex-officio member by the MHPA board.

The detailed information requested is as follows:

	Representation	*County of residence*	*Term ends*
Commodore R. C. Hastie CBE (Chairman)		West Glamorgan	31 January 1997
Mr. T. H. Keen (Vice Chairman)		South Glamorgan	31 January 1997
Capt. R. G. Brown DMS MBIM		Surrey	31 January 1997
Mr. T. O. Lewis CBE		Dyfed	31 January 1999
Sir W. A. Reardon-Smith Bt		London	31 January 1999
Cllr. H. E. Davies	Dyfed CC	Dyfed	31 January 1997
Cllr. B. Thomas-Cleaver	Preseli/Pembrokeshire DC	Pembroke	31 March 1996
Mr. D. V. Driscoll BEM	Wales TUC	West Glamorgan	31 January 1997
Mr. W. N. Clarke	Oil Industry	Dyfed	31 January 1997
Mr. J. C. Morris	Oil Industry	Dyfed	31 January 1999
Mr. M. J. Hyslop MBE (General Manager)	Milford Haven Port Authority	Dyfed	End of office

The remuneration is £8,805 for the chairman, £4,400.80 for the vice-chairman and £1,409.71 for members.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many questions were tabled to his Department in each Session since 1987–88; how many were not answered on grounds of disproportionate cost; what percentage of the total number of questions this represented; how many were not answered on the grounds that the information was not centrally available; and what percentage of the total number of questions this represented. [21136]

Mr. Norris: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Quarantine

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many imported pets have developed rabies in quarantine in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [20577]

Mrs. Browning: The only case of rabies in quarantine in the last 10 years was in a dog imported from Zambia in 1990. Taking into account the clinical picture and the laboratory results, a diagnosis of vaccine-induced rabies as made.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many imported pets have died in quarantine in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [20578]

Mrs. Browning: The number of imported pets—dogs and cats—that have died in quarantine in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years is as follows:

1986: 124
1987: 107
1988: 116
1989: 132
1990: 131
1991: 83
1992: 138
1993: 140
1994: 126
1995: 117

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average cost of the period of quarantine required for a domestic pet imported into the United Kingdom. [20579]

Mrs. Browning: Quarantine premises are all privately owned commercial enterprises and therefore free to set their own charges. The charges within specific quarantine premises will also vary according to the size of the animal. We believe that average charges for the six months' quarantine period are around £800 for a cat and £1,200 to £1,500 for a dog.

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many local veterinary inspectors and their assistants were involved on *(a)* 19 February, *(b)* 20 February, *(c)* 21 February, *(d)* 22 February and *(e)* 23 February in lairages near Dover in inspecting animals to ensure that they were fit to travel under the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994 and to deal with other related matters. [19431]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* No animals were inspected at lairages near Dover on 19 February.

On 20 February, two local veterinary inspectors were involved with inspections of animals in lairages near Dover. On 21 February, there were four LVIs involved with inspections of animals, on 22 February, two LVIs and on 23 February, one LVI.

The number of assistants used by the LVIs is not recorded by MAFF.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many consignments of farm animals were inspected by local veterinary inspectors and their assistants on each of 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23 February in lairages near Dover; how many *(a)* sheep and *(b)* calves were inspected; how many hours were spent in carrying out the inspections; and if he will make a statement. [19432]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* No animals were inspected at lairages near Dover on 19 February.

On 20 February four consignments of calves, totalling 680 animals were inspected. No sheep were inspected.

On 21 February, two consignments for calves, totalling 270 animals, and six consignments of sheep, totalling 2,173 animals, were inspected.

On 22 February, 15 consignments of calves, totalling 1,931 animals, and four consignments of sheep, totalling 664 animals, were inspected.

On 23 February, three consignments of calves, totalling 368 animals, and three consignments of sheep, totalling 846 animals, were inspected.

Local veterinary inspectors are not required under their conditions of appointment to record the times taken for these inspections and the Ministry does not record the times spent by each LVI in carrying out the inspections.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were deemed unfit to travel in each month of 1995 and in January 1996 by local veterinary inspectors when undertaking certification procedures of live animals destined for export; and if he will make a statement. [19433]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 March 1996]:* The number of animals deemed unfit to travel by local veterinary inspectors when undertaking certification procedures of live animals destined for export in each month of 1995 and January 1996 is as summarised in the table:

	Number
1995	
January	1,259
February	698
March	604
April	553
May	455
June	361
July	508
August	961
September	900
October	1,116
November	751
December	821
1996	
January	702

Capita Managed Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* facilities management consortia, *(b)* private finance initiative bids, *(c)* management buy-out consortia, *(d)* contractorisation schemes and *(e)* market-testing schemes in his Department in respect of which (i) Capita Managed Services and (ii) Lusis Business Solutions are currently involved in bidding. [19903]

Mr. Boswell *[holding answer 8 March 1996]:* Neither of the named companies is currently involved in bidding in any of the stated categories.

SCOTLAND

Executive Agencies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in each of the past five years Ministers in his Department have passed *(a)* hon. Members' letters and *(b)* hon. Members' questions to agencies for response; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of letters and questions received. [19417]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested in respect of hon. Members' letters is set out in the table. The information requested on hon. Members' questions is a matter of public record.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
(a) Number of letters passed to agencies for response	8	74	154	367	317
(b) Number of letters passed to agencies, *(a)*, as a percentage of total letters sent to Ministers about agencies	24	45	53	62	52

Scottish Natural Heritage

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that the reduction in the Scottish Natural Heritage budget will not impair its performance of its statutory duties; and if he will make a statement. [19307]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend is satisfied that SNH will continue to be able satisfactorily to carry out its statutory duties. Following the report of the study group on SNH published last December, a new strategic framework for SNH is being prepared in the light of changes affecting the natural heritage since publication in 1990 of "Scotland's Natural Heritage: The Way Ahead". The new document will be published in the first half of this year.

Cairngorm Funicular Railway

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Highlands and Islands Enterprise about the economic viability of the proposed Cairngorm funicular railway. [19987]

Mr. Kynoch: In accordance with the usual procedures for proposals involving financial assistance above certain limits, Highlands and Islands Enterprise has submitted to my right hon. Friend a request for approval to provide financial assistance to the Cairngorm Chairlift Co. in respect of the establishment of a new visitor uplift facility on Cairngorm. That request is supported by a detailed financial and economic assessment of the proposed investment.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what matters he will consider when determining whether to call in the planning application for the proposed railway on Cairngorm. [19988]

Mr. Kynoch: This matter has not formally been notified to my right hon. Friend. Should it be referred to him under the planning legislation he will take all relevant factors into account, including those relating to the UK Government's national and European obligations.

Private Prison

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will announce the site for the new private prison; and if he will make a statement. [19995]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A number of options are still under consideration at this time. I expect an announcement to be made in the near future.

Dounreay Nuclear Plant (Discharges)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received calling for a public inquiry on Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's discharge authorisations and reprocessing at Dounreay; and what plans he has to set up such an inquiry. [20210]

Mr. Kynoch: As of 1 March, the chief inspector of Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate had received 358 responses to his consultations on th United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's application for new discharge authorisations for its plant in Dounreay. Of these, 90 included representations that my right hon. Friend should

hold a public inquiry. My right hon. Friend had received one such representation himself as of the same date. He will carefully consider the points raised.

Squirrels

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the existing instruction for the collection of dead squirrels; and if he will make a statement. [19984]

Mr. Kynoch: The wildlife incident investigation scheme, which is administered by the agriculture departments and which investigates reports of suspected wildlife poisoning, has found no evidence to suggest that the existing instruction for the collection of dead squirrels is inadequate.

Skiing Sites

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money, in the form of grants, has been provided to assist the development and maintenance of Scotland's skiing industry by *(a)* Highlands and Islands Enterprise and *(b)* other agencies, in each financial year since 1979, for each skiing site. [20319]

Mr. Kynoch: The provision of grant assistance by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and its predecessor, the Highlands and Islands Development Board, for the development and maintenance of the skiing industry in Scotland is an operational matter for Highlands and Islands Enterprise and I have asked the chairman of that organisation to write to the hon. Member. Information on the amounts of grant assistance provided by other agencies for the same purposes for the years requested is not held centrally.

Enterprise Agencies (Grants)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines he has given to *(a)* Scottish Enterprise and *(b)* other enterprise agencies, on the cost per job created to be used when assessing grant applications. [20321]

Mr. Kynoch: The cost per job guidelines to be used in assessing grant applications vary, where applicable, according to the particular scheme of assistance under which grant has been applied for and according to the location of the project to be grant-aided. If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind, he may care to write to me.

School Class Sizes

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the range of class sizes in which five, six and seven-year-olds are taught; and how many children are taught in classes of each size. [20297]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The available information, which is in respect of pupils in P1, P2 and P3 single stage classes and P1/P2 and P2/P3 composite stage classes, is given in the table.

Number of classes and pupils by class size band in education authority primary schools (P1, P2 and P3) at September 1993[1]

Class size	*Number of classes*	*Number of pupils*
1–5	20	58
6–10	29	253
11–15	158	2,156
16–20	862	16,042
21–25	2,608	60,652
26–30	2,477	69,132
31 and over	927	29,646
Total	7,081	177,939

[1] Excludes pupils in P3/P4 composite classes and multi-stage classes.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the occasions on which he and his predecessors have attended Council of Ministers meetings since 9 April 1992. [20813]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As the Secretary of State, I attended the Council of Fisheries Ministers meeting on 26 October 1995. My predecessor attended the following Councils after 9 April 1992.

1993

January 25: Environment/Transport Council

September 20: Joint FAC/Agricultural Council

September 20: Joint FAC/Agricultural Council

September 21: Agricultural Council

Both the previous Secretary of State and I have been represented at other such meetings by other Scottish Ministers on many occasions.

Meetings of the Council of Ministers
Scottish Office Ministerial Attendance

	Council	*Minister*
1992—Total 6 Councils		
June 9	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
October 19	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
October 26–27	Agriculture Council	Sir Hector Monro
November 23	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
November 27	Education Council	Lord James Douglas-Hamilton
December 19	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
1993—Total 8 councils		
January 25	Environment/Transport Council	Secretary of State
March 18	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
June 24	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
September 20	Joint FAC/Agricultural Council	Secretary of State
September 21	Agriculture Council	Secretary of State
October 20	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
November 29–30	Justice/Interior Issues	Lord Fraser
December 20	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
1994—Total 8 Councils		
April 12	Fisheries Council	Lord Fraser
May 27–28	Justice/Interior Issues (Informal)	Lord Fraser
June 3–4	Regional Policy	Mr. Stewart
June 10	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
September 28	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
November 23	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
December 19–20	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
December 22	Fisheries Council (continuation)	Lord Fraser

Meetings of the Council of Ministers
Scottish Office Ministerial Attendance

	Council	*Minister*
1995–Total 7 Councils		
April 6	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
June 15	Fisheries Council	Sir Hector Monro
June 20–21	Justice/Home Affairs Council	Minister of State
October 26	Fisheries Council	Secretary of State
December 18	Environment Council	Earl of Lindsay
December 19	Agriculture Council	Earl of Lindsay
December 21	Fisheries Council	Mr. Raymond S. Robertson
1996 to date		
Nil	—	—

Shettleston Public Halls

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when Shettleston public halls were last renovated; and what was the total cost involved. [21097]

Mr. Kynoch: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Glasgow district council.

Deregulation (Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1968) Order 1995

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the annual saving to business from the Deregulation (Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1868) Order 1995. [19501]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 11 March 1996]:* The order will benefit business by permitting the sale of farmed salmon roe, estimated at about £12 million per annum, rather than giving rise to actual savings.

Railway Investment

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent by the Scottish Office on grants under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 or other legislation for *(a)* improvement of railway infrastructure and *(b)* new and reopened lines and stations, at outturn prices in Scotland in each year between 1975 and 1995. [19300]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[Holding answer 11 March 1996]:* Under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 grants totalling £82.3 million have been made by the Scottish Office, between 1974–75 and 1995, towards rail and rail-related projects. Some £58.9 million of the total was made for the replacement/acquisition of rolling stock rather than for railway infrastructure improvements or new or reopened lines or stations. Grants of £23.44 million were, however, made between 1974–75 and 1987–88 towards the Clyderail project which involved reopening, electrification and signalling works. The make-up of this project between reopening and other infrastructure work and by year is not available.

Grants made under other legislation are set out in the table:

ANNEXE

£000

	Freight facilities grants[1] Improvement of railway infrastructure	*Grants for repairs to listed buildings Improvement of railway infrastructure*
1974–75	—	—
1975–76	518.8	—
1976–77	3.5	—
1977–78	951.4	—
1978–79	84.1	—
1979–80	196.6	—
1980–81	1,844.2	—
1981–82	415.0	—
1982–83	179.9	—
1983–84	174.9	—
1984–85	1,802.1	—
1985–86	—	—
1986–87	—	—
1987–88	1,653.0	—
1988–89	—	—
1989–90	—	—
1990–91	—	—
1991–92	—	—
1992–93	—	—
1993–94	—	200.0
1994–95	—	—
Total	7,823.5	200.0

[1] This represents the amount of grant awarded each year for specific projects.

Historic Railway Structures

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list *(a)* the stations open to the public and *(b)* other structures and features in Scotland owned by Railtrack which are listed as historic buildings, in each case giving their grading; [19328]

(2) what was the total grant paid by public bodies responsible for historic buildings in Scotland to British Rail and Railtrack towards repair or restoration of listed buildings and structures in Scotland in each year from 1975 to 1995 at outturn prices. [19329]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* Since these are matters for Historic Scotland, I have asked the agency chief executive, Mr. Graeme Munro, to write to the hon. Member as soon as possible. A copy of Mr. Munro's letter will be placed in the Library of the House as the information requested will be lengthy.

Outstanding Payments

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what values of payments were outstanding within his Department on 5 March, which were beyond the date on the invoice and, where no date was specified, older than 28 days. [20484]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1996]:* The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Finance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated outturn public expenditure

on housing for 1995–96 and what is the planned public expenditure on housing for each of the years 1996–97 to 1998–99 *(a)* inclusive of capital receipts, *(b)* net of capital receipts, *(c)* inclusive of gross capital investment only, defined as local authority non-housing revenue account, local authority housing revenue account, Scottish Homes approved development programme, Scottish Homes own stock and new towns and *(d)* gross capital investment but excluding non-HRA. [19285]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 13 March 1996]:* The information requested is shown in the table. Further details will be published shortly in the Scottish Office departmental report. From 1996–97 expenditure on the non-HRA block will be included in a single capital allocation for all programmes excluding the HRA issued to local authorities. Information on non-HRA expenditure is therefore included only for 1995–96. In 1996–97, 25 per cent. of HRA receipts will be applied to reducing debt and 50 per cent. thereafter, and the figures for expenditure inclusive of capital receipts and for gross capital investment have been adjusted accordingly.

Public expenditure on housing

£ million

	1995–96 estimated outturn	*1996–97 plans*	*1997–98 plans*	*1998–99 plans*
(a) Gross including capital receipts (and NLF repayments)	1,105.9	730.7	642.1	629.2
(b) Net of capital receipts (and NLF repayments)	627.7	440.6	446.7	453.3
(c) Gross capital[1] Investment	1,021.2	655.3	561.2	540.3

[1] Of the five new town development corporations, two were wound up on 31 December 1995 and the remaining three will wind up on 31 December 1996.

Oil Seed Rape

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the findings of project FF382, carried out by the Scottish Crop Research Institute on the characterisation of oil seed rape; when it will be published; and what correlation the study found between oil seed rape and allergies. [20553]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 13 March 1996]:* The objective of the study was to determine the existence, identification, nature and mobility of volatile chemicals and pollen emitted by oil seed rape, and fungal spores from the crop, which are possible causes of an allergic response in humans, and to purify and standardise them for use in any clinical tests carried out. The study concluded that evidence that the crop can cause such problems has been obtained although as yet the precise cause or causes have not been identified. The study reports that some people react to pollen and fungal spores, but not in the numbers indicated by the percentage of study populations expressing symptoms, most of which showed no correlation with pollen or fungal exposure. The results indicated that agrochemicals seem unlikely to be involved in producing the symptoms. The study concluded that the most likely causes of allergic response in man appear to be volatile organic compounds, although categorical proof of the involvement of one or more is required. The study therefore recommends that further research in a number of areas is required.

Results from the study have already been published. Refereed papers include:

1. Robertson, G. W., Griffiths, D. W., Macfarlane Smith, W. H. and Butcher, R.D., 1993. The application of thermal desorption-gas chromatography-mass spectrometry to the analyses of flower volatiles from five varieties of oilseed rape (Brassica napus spp. oleifera). Phytochemical Analysis 4, 152–157.

2. Butcher, R. D., Macfarlane Smith, W. H., Robertson, G. W. and Griffiths, D. W. (1994). The identification of potential aeroallergen/irritant(s) from oilseed rape (Brassica napus spp. oleifera): volatile organic compounds emitted during flowering progression. Clinical and Experimental Allergy 24, 1105–1114,

3. Parrat, D., Macfarlane Smith, W. H., Thompson, G., Cameron, L. A. and Butcher, R. D. (1995). Evidence that oilseed rape (Brassica napus spp. oleifera) causes respiratory illness in rural dwellers, Scottish Medical Journal 40, 74–76.

4. Butcher, R. D., Goodman, B. A. and Deighton, N. (1995). Evaluation of the allergic/irritant potential of air pollutants. Detection of proteins modified by volatile organic compounds from oilseed rape (Brassica napus spp. oleifera) using electrospray ionisation-mass spectrometry. Clinical and Experimental Allergy 25, 985–992.

In addition, the results of the research have been presented at a number of scientific meetings and in technical notes; to relevant agricultural trade bodies; and other bodies. A number of other publications are in preparation.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken, and what sums the Government have spent to address the health risks of oil seed rape; and if he will make a statement. [20554]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 March 1996]:* The Scottish Office has funded the three–year research study by the Scottish Crop Research Institute into the volatile chemicals etcetera emitted by oil seed rape, at a cost of some £235,000. In addition, a research grant of £63,000 was awarded to Professor Anthony Seaton and colleagues at Aberdeen university in support of a three–year study into the health effects of oil seed rape.

The results of the latter study indicated that the health effects were slight. However, we are considering the implications of these studies with a view to determining what further research into the health effects might be useful and appropriate.

NHS Trust Directors (Insurance)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with the chairmen of NHS trusts concerning insuring trust directors against liabilities other than in cases of malfeasance. [20557]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 March 1996]:* None. The issue of guidance to the NHS in Scotland on the personal liability of non-executive directors is currently being considered.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Foreign Companies

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed by companies from *(a)* the north American region, *(b)* the south-east Asia region and *(c)* Europe in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) the Strangford constituency. [19489]

Mr. Ancram: The numbers of people employed by companies from *(a)* the north American region *(b)* the south-east Asia region and *(c)* Europe in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) the Strangford constituencies are set out in the following table:

Region	*Northern Ireland Employment in companies from the regions indicated*	*Strangford Employment in companies from the regions indicated*
North American region	16,693	438
South-east Asia region	3,021	—
Europe	6,964	69

Convictions

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those convictions in Northern Ireland which have come about as a direct result of information passed to the RUC from the Garda.[19624]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to identify those cases which were successfully prosecuted as a direct result of information passed to the RUC from the Garda.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the current pupil-teacher ratios in Northern Ireland for each of the different types of secondary school. [19832]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

School type	*Management type*	*1994–95 pupil: teacher ratio*
Non-Grammar Secondary	Controlled	13.9:1
	Maintained	14.2:1
	All non-Grammar	14.1:1
Grammar Secondary	Controlled	15.3:1
	Voluntary	16.3:1
	All Grammar	16.0:1
All Secondary		14.8:1

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the pupil-teacher ratio in the last year for which figures are available in schools in Northern Ireland at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary level, and what comparisons he has made with the ratio in (i) Scotland and (ii) England and Wales. [19831]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:-

(a) NI Primary pupil-teacher ratio for 1994–95—20.8:1

(b) NI Secondary pupil-teacher ratio for 1994–95—14.8:1

The latest available pupil-teacher ratios for all regions are for 1993–94 and are as follows:

Sector	*Northern Ireland*	*Scotland*	*England*	*Wales*
Primary	21.6:1	19.5:1	22.7:1	22.3:1
Secondary	15.1:1	12.8:1	16.4:1	15.9:1

Film Industry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total financial subsidy given by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to the film industry in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; what subsidies and incentives are available to film producers to produce films in Northern Ireland; how many films have been produced *(a)* totally and *(b)* partially in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; what proposals he has to introduce an all-Ireland film board; and if he will make a statement. [19873]

Mr. Ancram: The total financial support given from within its grant in aid by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to the film industry in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years is as follows:

1991–92: £10,538

1992–93: £25,000

1993–94: £80,000

1984–95: £50,000

1995–96 (estimate): £50,000

Film production projects are eligible for funding from the national lottery and, in 1995, the Arts Council announced an award of £200,000 towards the production of a film in Northern Ireland.

Information about the number of films produced totally or partially in Northern Ireland is not available.

The Government have no proposals to introduce an all-Ireland film board, but are considering options for the development of film and television production in Northern Ireland.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the recommendations made by the Government of the Irish Republic under article 6 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement since it was signed; and if he will list the appointments made as a result of these recommendations indicating to which bodies they were made. [19828]

Sir John Wheeler: Since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, the Irish Government have suggested 153 people for public appointments in Northern Ireland. It is not possible to identify all those appointed since 1985, but 24 candidates proposed by the Irish Government currently hold 28 public appointments on the bodies to which they were nominated. All appointments are made on merit. It is not my practice to publish details of individuals so appointed.

Gaming Machines

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to extend the proposed deregulation on amusement with prizes gaming machines in Great Britain to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [19834]

Mr. Moss: These and other deregulation initiatives in the gambling field are being monitored to ascertain their local impact and the need for action to amend the law in Northern Ireland. Appropriate issues will be raised in the consultation paper to be published by the end of this year as part of a review of the local gambling law. Amending legislation will follow, as necessary, when decisions are taken.

Sports Councils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what projects were jointly funded between the Northern Ireland Sports Council and the Sports Councils in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the Irish Republic in 1995, and at what cost. [19866]

Mr. Ancram: The Sports Council for Northern Ireland is involved with the Scottish, Great Britain and Welsh Sports Councils in funding the following UK-wide initiatives, and contributes:

	£
Drug testing	15,000
Coaching matters	11,000
Champion coaching	20,000

There are no projects funded with COSPOIR, the Republic of Ireland's Sports Council.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times the chairman of the Northern Ireland Sports Council met the chairmen of the Sports Councils in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the Irish Republic in 1995. [19865]

Mr. Ancram: Meetings took place as follows:

Chairman of the Scottish Sports Council: 14 times

Chairman of the GB Sports Council: 17 times

Chairman of the Welsh Sports Council: 16 times

Chairman of COSPOIR: 3 times

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of co-operation between the Northern Ireland Sports Council and the Sports Councils in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the Irish Republic; and what plans there are to enhance co-operation and promote more jointly funded projects. [19867]

Mr. Ancram: The Sports Council for Northern Ireland co-operates with the other home country Sports Councils in UK-wide initiatives. These are taken forward through committee representation, strategic planning and funding, for example:

UK Facilities Design

UK Management Award

National Lottery

Coaching Matters

Champion Coaching

Major Events Support Group

Drug Control Unit

SC Advisory Group Marital Arts

UK Research Consortium

Valuing Volunteers

Recognition Activities/Governing Bodies

Sports Aid Foundation

Mountain Leadership/Rescue

Running Sport (Education/Training

Youth Sport Trust

UK Co-ordinating Committee for People with Disabilities

The Northern Ireland Sports Council and the Sports Council in the Republic of Ireland, COSPOIR, have biannual information exchange meetings at members/officers level. These have resulted in formal and informal exchanges in areas such as:

Strategy for Development of Sport

Drug Testing

Education/Training

Research

Sport for all Leader Award

Mountain Leadership/Rescue

European Funding

Outdoor Centre Programmes

Enhanced co-operation with COSPOIR is being explored in:

(a) development and implementation of strategies, particularly in relation to the 35 all-Ireland governing bodies of sport;

(b) consideration of an all-Ireland sport for all leader award; and

(c) development of education resource material.

Jointly funded projects in 1995–96 are:

Rationalisation of coach education schemes/awards: Cost £7,000

Sport for all Leader Award: Cost £8,000

Class Sizes

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what current agreements or restrictions apply in respect of class sizes in Northern Ireland. [19830]

Mr. Ancram: The maximum size of a class in a secondary school in Northern Ireland is restricted, by regulation 15 of the Secondary Schools (Grant Conditions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1973, to 20 pupils for a class in a practical subject and 35 in other subjects. There are no similar provisions in the primary sector.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the range of class sizes in which, five, six and seven-year-olds are taught; and how many children are taught in classes of each size. [20296]

Mr. Ancram: The information is not collected in the form requested.

Private Schools

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the areas in which he assists private schools with public money indicating the amounts of money spent in the past financial year. [19829]

Mr. Ancram: No financial assistance was given to independent schools in Northern Ireland in the past financial year.

Fishing Fleet

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present size of the Northern Ireland fishing fleet; what was its size in each of the last five years; how many boat owners have sought the financial incentives available to decommission their boats in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [19872]

Mr. Ancram: The number of licensed vessels in the Northern Ireland fishing fleet at the end of February 1996 and at the end of December of each of the previous five years is shown in the table.

	Length	
	Over 10 metres	*10 metres and under*
1996	199	163
1995	207	161
1994	215	154
1993	219	139
1992	253	n/a
1991	257	n/a

For 1991 to 1993 the information is shown by registered length and from 1994 by overall length. The licensing of 10 m and under vessels was introduced with effect from 1 May 1993.

There were no UK fishing vessel decommissioning schemes in 1991 and 1992. Under the 1993, 1994 and 1995 UK schemes 68, 84 and 30 applications respectively were received from Northern Ireland vessel owners. Under the 1995 Northern Ireland decommissioning scheme for nephrops vessels, 23 applications were received.

Sentencing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce new proposals on sentencing in the courts similar to those announced for England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [20271]

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will shortly publish his proposals for England and Wales in a White Paper. I shall take a close interest in the public response and will be particularly keen to hear what people in Northern Ireland think about these important issues. It is, however, a well-established principle—at the heart of the new impetus we have sought to give in recent years to the development of criminal justice policy—that we have ultimately to develop our own solutions to crime problems in Northern Ireland, in the light of our own circumstances and pressures.

Community Relations Council

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who are the current members of the Community Relations Council; and what remuneration they receive. [19990]

Mr. Ancram: The members of the council are as follows:

Dr. Arthur Aughey
Jonathan Bardon (Chairman)
Ms May Blood
Ms Joan Broder
Ms Mary Canavan
Ms Tanya Gallagher
Ms Avila Kilmurray
Rev. Tim Kinahan
Fr. Brian Lennon
Aodan MacPoilin
Ms Geraldine McAteer
Eamonn McCartan
Ms Ann McLaughlin
Ms Monica McWilliams
Dr. Duncan Morrow
George Patterson
Billy Robinson

A number of further Government appointments are expected to be made in the near future. The chairman receives an honorarium of £8,587 per annum for his services. The other members of the council receive no remuneration, other than travelling expenses.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who are the current members of the cultural traditions group of the Community Relations Council; and how they are selected. [19991]

Mr. Ancram: The cultural traditions group is a sub-committee of the Community Relations Council and currently consists of the following members of the council:

Dr. A. Aughey
Mr. J. Bardon
Mr. A. MacPoilin
Mr. E. McCartan
Dr. M. McWilliams

and the following external members who are co-opted by the council to the group in line with agreed criteria:

Ms K. Baird
Dr. J. Bell
Ms I. Foley
Ms C. Gallagher
Professor D. Harkness
Dr. J. Hawthorne
Dr. M. Hill
Ms M. Jefferson
Mr. G. Lucy
Mr. B. McFerran
Mr. V. McIver
Mr. M. McLoone
Mr. S. Nolan
Mr. C. Ryder
Mr. P. Sweeney

The term of several members of the group will end in March 1996.

Exports

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total value of exports from Northern Ireland for each of the past five years. [20016]

Mr. Ancram: Statistics on Northern Ireland's exports are currently available only for the financial years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 and are provided. These are taken from a survey undertaken on the Industrial Development Board's behalf by the Northern Ireland economic research centre and published in April 1995.

Year	*Value of exports £ million*
1991–92	4,124
1992–93	4,588
1993–94	4,764

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total value of exports from Northern Ireland to *(a)* the north American region, *(b)* Great Britain, *(c)* Europe, *(d)* south-east Asia and *(e)* the Republic of Ireland for each of the last five years. [20022]

Mr. Ancram: Statistics on Northern Ireland's exports are currently available only for the financial years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 and are provided in the table. These are taken from a survey undertaken on the Industrial Development Board's behalf by the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre and published in April 1995.

£ million

Destination of sales	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
North America	173.9	182.5	242.6
Great Britain	2,312	2,425	2,516
Europe[1]	741.8	1,057.4	957.2
South East Asia	54.5	104.3	134.1
Republic of Ireland	424	491	557

[1] Excluding Great Britain and Republic of Ireland.

Irish and Ulster Scots Languages

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the current budget of the central community relations unit is being devoted to *(a)* Irish language groups and *(b)* Ulster Scots language groups. [19992]

Mr. Ancram: The budget of the central community relations unit for 1995–96 is £5,327,000. Of this, £219,790—4.13 per cent.—is being used to assist Irish language groups, either directly or through the grant to the cultural traditions group.

Some £13,970—0.26 per cent. of the CCRU budget—comprises grants made by the cultural traditions group to the Ulster Scots Heritage Council and the Ulster Scots Academic Press.

In addition, district councils may have made small payments to Irish language and Ulster Scots groups drawing on grants from CCRU under its district council community relations programme.

Miss Rita O'Hare

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 1996, *Official Report*, columns *749–50*, what efforts were made to arrest Miss Rita O'Hare on her recent visit to Scotland. [20044]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: This is a matter for the police, but I understand that the RUC had no knowledge of any visit by Miss O'Hare to Scotland.

Mobile Classrooms

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many children in Northern Ireland are taught in mobile classrooms; [20288]

(2) at the rate of closure in 1994–95, when the last mobile classroom currently being used in Northern Ireland will be closed; [20289]

(3) how many mobile classrooms were in use in Northern Ireland in each of the past 10 years. [20290]

Mr. Ancram: Information about the number of mobile classrooms in use in each of the past 10 years, and the number of children taught in such classrooms, is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The number of classrooms currently in use is estimated to be 4,000.

There is no specific time scale for the closure of individual mobile classrooms. The replacement of mobile classrooms by permanent accommodation has a high priority in my Department's capital programme within the confines of available capital resources.

School Computers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many computers are currently in use in Northern Ireland Schools and; how many children there are for every computer in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools. [20291]

Mr. Ancram: Available data relate to 1993–94, when there were 25,500 computers and a pupil-computer ratio of 22:1 in primary schools and 8:1 in secondary schools.

Teachers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what training is provided to head teachers in Northern Ireland; and what proposals he has for additional provision. [20292]

Mr. Ancram: Training is provided by the education and library boards curriculum advisory and support services and the regional training unit, following annual consultation with schools about their training requirements. There are no immediate plans for additional provision.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what are the mechanisms for

(i) appraising and (ii) removing a head teacher who is underperforming; and what plans he has to change them; [20293]

(2) if he will set out the procedures for ending the appointment of an inadequate teacher and the time scales involved; and what plans he has to alter the procedures. [20295]

Mr. Ancram: Teachers and head teachers are subject to the dismissal provisions contained in paragraph 5 of schedule 4 to the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, or, where relevant, to dismissal procedures drawn up by individual school boards of governors. Proposals detailing the steps to be followed in dealing with teachers, including principals, whose work is unsatisfactory have recently been put to the Northern Ireland Teachers Council by the employing authorities.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present system of teacher appraisal; and what plans he has to review it. [20294]

Mr. Ancram: A staff development and performance review scheme is currently being introduced for all teachers, starting with the training of head teachers from the 1995–96 school year. It comprises preparation and job observation, followed by a discussion and a summary statement. Plans for its review have yet to be drawn up.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the occasions on which he and his predecessors have attended Council of Ministers meetings since April 1992. [20814]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Neither I nor my predecessor have attended any Council of Ministers meetings since April 1992.

WALES

Inward Investment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, columns *93–94*, how many inward investment company visits arranged by Invest in Britain have been made to Wales during the past 12 months; and in how many of these instances the companies concerned met officials from the Welsh Office. [20256]

Mr. Hague: There have been 13 inward investment visits introduced to Wales by the Invest in Britain Bureau over the past 12 months. The Welsh Office was involved in five of these visits and Welsh Office Ministers in two of those.

Welsh Language

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what plans he has to extend and improve the range of titles in the Welsh language on multimedia software; and what assessment he has made of the titles available; [20310]

(2) what assessment he has made of the range of software in the Welsh language currently available to run on *(a)* the Pentium multimedia personal computers of Research Machines and *(b)* Acorn personal computers. [20311]

Mr. Richards: The Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales has a specific remit to commission multimedia software in Welsh, and has already sought tenders for three titles. Four hundred and twenty-five titles were offered under the multimedia initiative for primary schools. Only two were in Welsh. Neither was considered suitable for purchase. Our assessment of other software is that more is desirable, but its range and type are a matter for users in the first instance.

Ariane Programme

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the European Commission's Ariane programme as a means of promoting the Welsh language and Wales in the European Union. [20260]

Mr. Richards: Priority will be given to lesser-used languages under the Ariane programme; Welsh language organisations will be encouraged to apply when the programme is agreed.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the European Commission's Ariane programme; and if he will publish them. [20259]

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend and I have received representations from the Arts Council of Wales and Ms Eluned Morgan MEP; I have placed copies of the representations in the Library of the House, together with copies of my replies.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will undertake a study of the criteria for determining areas designated for regional assistance in Wales to identify discrepancies between those areas currently most in need of assistance, and the areas recognised as in need on this basis of the criteria used when the last regional assistance map was established. [20008]

Mr. Hague: No. The assisted areas map can be reviewed only on a Great Britain basis. It was introduced in 1993 and the Government have made it clear that it will not be reviewed within the lifetime of this Parliament.

Multimedia Portables Initiative

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations were undertaken with primary schools *(a)* in drawing up the specifications for the Welsh Office multimedia portables initiative and *(b)* once the bids were received, on supplying them with hardware and software under the Welsh Office multimedia portables initiative; [20003]

(2) what consultations were undertaken with *(a)* the Welsh Joint Education Committee, *(b)* the Wales

Curriculum and Assessment Authority and *(c)* the Welsh Language Board, (i) in drawing up the specifications for the Welsh Office multimedia portables initiative and (ii) once the bids were received, on supplying schools with hardware and software under the Welsh Office multimedia portables initiative. [20005]

Mr. Richards: Schools were invited to choose between a multimedia suite and portable computers. Those who chose multimedia were invited to indicate a preference for one of three platforms; those who chose portables to indicate what type of portable. No guarantee was given that the Department would meet first preferences. Further consultation either on detailed technical specifications or post-bid would have been impracticable. The Department was assisted throughout by meetings with local education authority advisers.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he gave for the availability of software that would be operable in the Welsh language when drawing up the specifications for the Welsh Office multimedia portables initiative; and if this was a consideration when the contract for *(a)* the hardware and *(b)* the software was offered to Research Machines. [20001]

Mr. Richards: Careful consideration was given to this both pre-tender and post-tender. Research Machines has no contract to supply software.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make additional finance available for primary schools to train teachers to use the Pentium 75 multimedia personal computers provided under the Welsh Office multimedia portables initiative; [20263]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to schools using Acorn personal computers of making full use of Research Machines Pentium personal computers. [20002]

Mr. Richards: Funding will be made available under the grants for education support and training programme as planned. Primary schools can draw on the £3 million made available under GEST to promote the use of IT in 1996–97. The platform purchased represents the best buy in overall value-for-money terms.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he made of the capability of Research Machines, under the contract awarded through the Welsh Office multimedia portables initiative, to support the statutory study of the Welsh language in the national curriculum. [20000]

Mr. Richards: Support of this character is for the Department and the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales among others, not for Research Machines.

Agriculture Department

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were employed by his Department's agriculture department in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [20172]

Mr. Hague: The total numbers of full-time equivalent permanent staff employed within the Welsh Office agriculture department at 31 December in each year are as follows:

1993: 416

1994: 443

1995: 432

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people he estimates will be employed by the agriculture department at the end of the current year; and if he will make a statement. [20077]

Mr. Hague: Four hundred and fifty-four permanent full-time equivalent staff on 31 March 1996.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many claims for capital grants and environmentally sensitive area payments his Department's agriculture department's divisional offices has processed in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [20171]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is shown in the following table:

Scheme	*Number of claims processed in 1994*	*1995*
Capital grants	3,119	2,070
Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESAs)	1,454	1,384

GP Vacancies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to monitor the number of vacancies for general medical practitioners in Wales. [20254]

Mr. Hague: It would serve no useful purpose to collect this information routinely at a national level. Family health services authorities hold information about the number of vacancies in their area and provide advice to my Department on general trends as and when necessary.

FHSAs also provide more specific advice to the Medical Practices Committee. The MPC has responsibility for controlling the distribution of GPs in England and Wales with the aim of ensuring that there are adequate numbers of GPs throughout the country.

Livestock Schemes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many claims for the four main livestock schemes his Department's agriculture department's divisional offices have dealt with in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995; and if he will make a statement. [20170]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The numbers of claims processed were as follows:

	1994	*1995*
Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances	14,143	13,444
Sheep Annual Premium Scheme	16,440	15,441
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme	15,752	14,777
Beef Special Premium Scheme (Finals)	22,420	25,017

The number processed under each scheme each year varies according to the number of claims carried forward for payment from one year to the next.

Manufacturing Projects

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 March, *Official Report*, column *207*, on the number of new manufacturing projects given financial assistance by his Department, if he will review the industrial investment incentives of his Department to secure a higher number of offers in Gwynedd and Dyfed; and if he will make a statement. [20265]

Mr. Hague: There are no proposals for the operating departments to review the terms of the regional selective assistance scheme. The Welsh Development Agency and others are working very hard to achieve a wider spread of manufacturing projects throughout Wales.

School Computers

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of primary schools use *(a)* Acorn personal computers and *(b)* Pentium personal computers supplied by Research Machines. [20004]

Mr. Richards: Precise percentages are not held by the Department.

Sea Empress

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funds will be available to recompense those engaged in tourism who have been financially affected by the oil spillage from the Sea Empress. [20010]

Mr. Hague: Compensation for economic loss caused by oil pollution from the Sea Empress will be available from the vessel's insurers and from the international oil pollution compensation fund, up to a limit of about £57 million.

In addition, the Wales tourist board has launched a campaign to reassure visitors that the beaches of south-west Wales will be clean by the summer season.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the occasions on which he and his predecessors have attended Council of Ministers meetings since 9 April 1992. [20846]

Mr. Hague: I attended the meeting of the Environment Council on 4 March this year. My predecessor attended a Transport Council on 19 June 1995. The then Minister of State, Welsh Office—the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts)—attended the informal council on regional policy on 12 and 13 November 1993.

Wilprint Ltd.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date Wilprint Ltd. was removed from the approved contractors' list for departmental printing work. [20845]

Mr. Hague: 27 April 1992.

HEALTH

Pensioners (Health Costs)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many pensioners received *(a)* free prescriptions, *(b)* courses of (i) free and (ii) reduced rate dental treatment and *(c)* free NHS sight tests, reduced private sight tests and spectacle vouchers for (1) 1989 and (2) the most recent year for which information is available under the NHS low income scheme; [19651]

(2) how many pensioners received assistance with NHS health costs from *(a)* income support, *(b)* being in receipt of certificate AG2 and *(c)* being in receipt of certificate AG3; and what estimate he has made of the number who paid full charges but could have received reduced charges if they had applied for AG2 or AG3 in (i) 1989 and (ii) the most recent year for which information is available. [19650]

Mr. Malone: All pensioners are entitled to free national health service prescriptions. Pensioners as a group are not entitled to free NHS sight tests, spectacle vouchers or dental treatment but may be entitled to help through the NHS low income scheme. Pensioners are not identified in the information collected about the number of free or reduced cost courses of dental treatments, NHS sights tests and spectacle vouchers. No information is available about the number of pensioners who pay for sight tests, spectacles and dental treatment but would be entitled to help if they made a low income scheme claim.

The available information is in the table:

Thousands

	1989–90	*1994–95*
1. Pensioners claiming income support	[1]1,432	[1]1,584
2. Partners of pensionable age	179	208
3. Pensioners holding certificate AG2[2]	not available	229
4. Partners of pensionable age	not available	87
5. Pensioners holding certificate AG3[2]	not available	178
6. Partners of pensionable age	not available	73
7. Prescriptions dispensed to pensioners	[3]147,300	[4]184,200
8. Courses of NHS dental treatment for patients aged 65 or over treated as exempt on grounds of low income[5]	370	[6]—

Lines 1–6 are in respect of Great Britain. Lines 7–8 are in respect of England.

[1] From a sample in May each year.

[2] AG2/AG3 are issued for six months.

[3] Based on fees for prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only.

[4] Based on items dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only.

[5] This includes holders of AG2s/AG3s and recipients of Income Support or Family Credit. Information is not available separately in respect of each group.

[6] Figures are not now produced routinely and recent figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pensioners are women aged 60 or more and men aged 65 or more.

Safety of Medicines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what budget the Licensing Authority made available to the Committee on Safety of Medicines for each year from 1971 to 1994 in respect of its statutory role to promote the collection of adverse drug reactions. [20060]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency undertakes the role of promoting the collection of adverse drug reactions on behalf of the committee and seeks its advice as appropriate. An overall budget of £821,986 was devoted to running and promoting the spontaneous adverse drug reaction reporting scheme in the financial year 1994–95. Information since 1971 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions since the coming into effect of the Medicines Act 1968 on which *(a)* the Licensing Authority, *(b)* the medicines division of the Department of Health, *(c)* the Medicines Control Agency or its staff and *(d)* the Committee on Safety of Medicines or its chairman have (i) sought and (ii) obtained an injunction or interdict preventing publication of information relating to the safety of medicines licensed or formerly licensed under the provisions of the Act; and if he will list for each case the date on which an injunction or interdict was sought, the products concerned, the grounds on which the action was taken, if the action was contested, and the outcome. [20064]

Mr. Malone: We have no record of any such proceedings.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the procedures of the Medicines Control Agency. [20058]

Mr. Malone: The procedures of the Medicines Control Agency are a matter for the agency chief executive operating within relevant statutory provisions and the agency's framework document. The chief executive is accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health for the efficient management and overall performance of the agency. The agency is subject to regular review. The latest review was completed last year and a summary of its findings placed in the Library.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms are available to members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines who wish to raise matters of concern in relation to the workings of the committee. [20062]

Mr. Malone: Committee members have the power to regulate the committee's procedures under schedule 1, paragraph 4 of the Medicines Act 1968. In addition, individual committee members are free to raise any issues which they consider to be of relevance to the workings of the committee, either with the chairman, at committee meetings or by writing to the appointing authority, the United Kingdom Health Ministers.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training in the interpretation of epidemiological data is provided to new members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines on their appointment. [20061]

Mr. Malone: Members are appointed for their individual expertise in the fields of medicine, pharmacy or science. Their specialist knowledge and judgment contribute to the advice given by the Committee to the Licensing Authority. In addition, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *521–24*.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates *(a)* he and *(b)* his ministerial colleagues met the chairman of the Committee on Safety of Medicines since 1 January 1995. [20063]

Mr. Malone: The chairman of the committee met me on 3 October 1995.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of his Department in the consideration of issues relating to third generation oral contraceptives prior to the decision taken on 16 October 1995. [20057]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made in the House on 23 October 1995 at columns 701–11.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have been made in the *(a)* data sheets and *(b)* summary of product characteristics of third generation oral contraceptives on the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. [20059]

Mr. Malone: None.

North Staffordshire Trauma Centre

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns 356–68, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the North Staffordshire trauma centre; and if he will ensure continued funding for the centre. [20188]

Mr. Horam: We published on 6 March a report of a Sheffield university research study on the cost-effectiveness of the regional trauma centre in the north-west midlands.

The continued funding of the North Staffordshire trauma centre is a matter for local health authorities.

Hydrotherapy Pools

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he is giving to health authorities and those involved with the design of acute hospitals in respect of the provision of hydrotherapy pools. [20323]

Mr. Horam: NHS Estates has issued, to NHS trusts and health authorities, health building note 8 "Rehabilitation—accommodation for physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy" (1991) which includes details of the requirements for hydrotherapy suites. Technical advice is given in health technical memoranda 2027 (HTM)—"Operational management—Hot and cold water supply, storage and mains services" (1995); and HTM 2040 "Design considerations and operational management—the control of legionellae in healthcare premises—a code or practice" (1994).

Copies of the documents will be placed in the Library.

Water Fluoridation

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the fluoridation of London's drinking water supply. [20390]

Mr. Malone: Fluoridation of water supplies is a matter for local decision.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the national health service executive is taking in respect of the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales paper on the community health council review process; when it was submitted to the NHS executive; and if he will make a statement. [20604]

Mr. Malone: The national health service executive received details of the Association of Community Health Councils views on how the CHC review process might work and the appropriate relationship with regional offices, under cover of a letter dated 11 January 1996. The NHS executive is considering the views expressed by the association.

Medical Waste

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there is a list of approved contractors dealing with medical waste from hospitals. [20768]

Mr. Horam: There is not a central list of approved contractors for disposal of clinical waste. It is for each national health service trust or contracting authority to satisfy itself, prior to any invitation to tender, that those invited to bid have the capability to meet the required technical, financial and quality performance standards.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on how many occasions in the past five years letters have been sent by the National Health Service Estates agency to NHS hospital trusts about medical waste management; [20789]

(2) what reviews of waste management procedures the National Health Service Estates agency has asked each NHS hospital trust to undertake; [20790]

(3) if he will publish the guidelines for the disposal of medical waste form *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* nursing homes, *(c)* mortuaries, *(d)* doctors' surgeries and *(e)* veterinary surgeries. [20759]

Mr. Horam: The National Health Service Estates agency has issued five guidance documents and two estates policy letters to the NHS in the past five years. They relate to NHS bodies obligations under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and their duty of care in relation to the disposal of clinical waste. These are specifically aimed at hospitals and primary care services. The NHS Estates agency is not responsible for issuing guidance to private nursing homes or veterinary surgeries.

As waste producers, NHS bodies' are bound to ensure that waste is disposed of safely and properly. Enforcement of the Act is, however, the responsibility of the local environmental health department. The NHS Estates agency does not have responsibility for reviewing procedures.

The guidance documents are:

Health Guidance Note—Clinical Waste Incineration Joint Venture Arrangements (March 1995);

Health Guidance Note—Safe Disposal of Clinical Waste Whole Hospital Policy (April 1995);

Strategic Guide for Waste Management (March 1991);

Strategic Guide to Clinical Waste Management (January 1994);

Health Service Guidelines HSG(94)50 Clinical Waste Management (December 1994).

The estates policy letters, EPL(92)8 and EPL(95)33 reminded the NHS of the previous guidance.

Copies of the guidance will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the tendering procedures for the disposal of medical waste from hospitals. [20791]

Mr. Horam: Tendering procedures for the disposal of clinical waste from hospitals should be in accordance with the Public Services Contract Regulations 1993 (SI 1993/3228) and the Environmental Protection Act 1990. In addition, the National Health Service Estates agency has issued guidance on medical waste management.

Derriford Hospital, Plymouth

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what communications he has received from Plymouth Hospitals NHS trust regarding the elderly patient who fell to his death at Derriford hospital, Plymouth, on 9 March; and if he will make a statement. [20599]

Mr. Horam: We have received no communication from Derriford hospital about this matter. I understand that the trust is holding a full inquiry. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Vernon Seccombe, JP, chairman of Plymouth Hospitals NHS trust, for further information.

Aids for Elderly and Disabled People

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the local authority social services departments that make charges for aids for elderly and disabled people. [20757]

Mr Bowis: Information reported by authorities shows that some two thirds of social services departments in England gained no income from fees or charges in relation to adaptations to homes or the provision of disability equipment for elderly or physically or sensorily disabled people in the financial year 1993–94. Specific information about individual authorities' charges are not available centrally.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [16013]

Mr. Horam *[pursuant to his reply, 22 February 1996, c. 289]:* I regret that my previous answer contained incorrect information relating to the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting; the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work; the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority; and the Medical Practices Committee. The revised reply is as follows:

Those NDPBs which are:

Subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner:

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work;

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority;

Medical Practices Committee.

Subject to scrutiny by the Audit Commission:

English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office:

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work;

English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting;

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority;

Medical Practices Committee;

National Biological Standards Board;

National Radiological Protection Board;

Public Health Laboratory Services Board.

Subject to statutory provisions for open government:

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work;

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

Subject to performance indicators:

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work;

English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting;

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority;

National Biological Standards Board;

National Radiological Protection Board;

Public Health Laboratory Services Board.

Subject to provisions under the Citizen's Charter:

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of *(a)* households and (b) individuals have (i) wholly earned, (ii) wholly unearned and (iii) part-earned and part-unearned incomes; and if he will break down the figures by income level. [13483]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Such information as is available is in the tables.

Proportions of individuals in households with household income that is (i) wholly earned (ii) part earned, part unearned (iii) wholly unearned, for each quintile of the income distribution and overall, United Kingdom, 1992–93

Percentage

Percentage of individuals in households where the household income is:	*Quintiles of income distribution*					
	Bottom	*Second*	*Third*	*Fourth*	*Top*	*All individuals*
Before housing costs						
Wholly earned	1	2	3	5	4	3
Part earned, part unearned	32	55	79	85	88	68
Wholly unearned	68	44	18	11	8	29
All income	100	100	100	100	100	100
After housing costs						
Wholly earned	1	2	4	5	3	3
Part earned, part unearned	31	57	79	83	87	68
Wholly unearned	67	41	17	12	10	29
All income	100	100	100	100	100	100

1. Earned income includes income for employment and self-employment. Unearned income includes state pensions and any other income from benefits (including Child Benefit), occupational and personal pensions, investment income, and any other miscellaneous income.
2. The information in the table is derived from the 1992–93 Households Below Average Income dataset. 1992–93 is the latest date for which results are available. Figures for 1992–93 are for two calender years data combined.
3. Each quintile represents 20 per cent. of the income distribution.
4. All estimates are subject to sampling error. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated increased administrative cost for his Department resulting from the introduction of the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1996. [16624]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Operational procedures have not yet been finalised, but the administrative costs are not expected to be significant.

Pensions

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals currently have their earnings-related pension reduced as a result of payments from a company pension scheme. [18854]

Mr. Heald: As at 31 March 1995, there were 2,305,840 individuals whose additional pension was reduced, or extinguished, as a result of contracted-out deductions in respect of payments from a company or personal pension scheme.

The contracted-out deduction is the term used to describe the reduction in the additional pension of someone who has been a member of a contracted-out pension scheme or a personal pension scheme used in place of the additional pension.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 19 February, *Official Report*, column *40*, *(a)* what the breakdown in public spending per capita and per recipient is estimated by the Government Actuary to be on (i) retirement pensions, (ii) the state earnings-related pension scheme, (iii) other public pensions and (iv) all publicly provided pensions, *(b)* what is the corresponding estimate of contributions required per capita and per contributor from national insurance and *(c)* what is the corresponding estimate of the percentage of gross domestic product of total public spending on pensions, on the basis of the Government's assumption of 1.5 per cent. per annum growth in (1) 1994–95, (2) 2000–01, (3) 2010–11, (4) 2020–21 and (5) 2030–31, at 1994 prices. [19031]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Public spending on all publicly provided pensions is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Government Actuary's Department does not forecast the number of SERPS recipients.

Such information as is available is shown in the tables:

Breakdown of public spending

£

	1994–95	*2000–01*	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*
Retirement pensions					
Per capita	474	514	566	584	693
Per recipient	2,663	2,709	2,710	2,838	2,850
SERPS					
Per capita	32	72	141	181	198
Per recipient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other public pensions					
Per capita	18	13	11	20	19
Per recipient	2,485	2,462	2,340	2,600	2,600

Contributions required

£

	1994–95	*2000–01*	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*
Retirement pensions					
Per capita	474	514	566	584	693
Per contributor	1,300	1,313	1,400	1,419	1,753
SERPS					
Per capita	32	72	141	181	198
Per contributor	87	185	350	440	502
Other public pensions					
Per capita	18	13	11	20	19
Per contributor	50	32	27	49	47

Percentage of GDP

Total spending on pensions (i), (ii) and (iii)	*Percentage*
1994–95	4.4 per cent.
2000–01	4.7 per cent.
2010–11	5.0 per cent.
20020–21	4.7 per cent.
2030–31	4.8 per cent.

1. All figures are based on 1994–95 prices. Spending is rounded to the nearest £1, and percentages are rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.
2. Retirement pensions are comprised of basic retirement pension and graduated retirement benefit.
3. Other public pensions are comprised of widows' pension (basic) and widows' pension (additional pension).
4. Expenditure on benefits and population figures are taken from the report by the Government Actuary on the third quinquennial review under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975.
5. Numbers of recipients and contributors are taken from, or under the Pensions Bill 1994 report by the Government Actuary on the financial provisions of the Bill on the national insurance fund, except for 1994–95 which are based on actual numbers.
6. The number of contributors each year excludes approximately 200,000 people paying class 3 contributions.
7. The underlying GDP figures assume 1.5 per cent. per annum growth from the 1994–95 GDP figure given in table 6A.1 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1996–97.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* public spending on SERPS and *(b)* the corresponding contribution rate in respect of SERPS only (i) before the Pensions Act 1995 and (ii) in (1) 1994–95, (2) 2000–01, (3) 2010–11, (4) 2020–21 and (5) 2030–31, at 1994 prices. [19211]

Mr. Heald: There is no corresponding contribution rate in respect of SERPS only. The contribution rate is a global figure calculated so that it is sufficient to pay all national insurance fund benefits on a pay-as-you-go basis. However, some indication of a contribution rate equivalent to net SERPS expenditure is given in the table.

Percentage

	1994–95	*2000–01*	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*
Pre Pensions Act 1995					
Net SERPS expenditure £ billion	1.8	4.2	9.2	14.5	18.7
Equivalent contribution rate	0.8	1.5	2.6	3.7	4.5
Post Pensions Act 1995					
Net SERPS expenditure £ billion	1.8	4.2	8.4	10.9	12.0
Equivalent contribution rate	0.8 per cent.	1.5 per cent.	2.4 per cent.	2.8 per cent.	2.8 per cent.

Notes:

1. The principle underlying the table is that if, say, estimated net SERPS expenditure equals one-quarter of total expenditure on national insurance fund benefits then one-quarter of the contribution rate necessary to balance the Fund pays for the net SERPS. Hence, the lower is net SERPS expenditure the lower the equivalent contribution rate will be.
2. The contribution rate in the above table is that part of the gross class 1 contribution rate required to meet the estimated cost of net SERPS. However, it is assumed that a similar proportion of class 2, 3 and 4 contributions is also used to meet the cost of net SERPS.
3. The expenditure on net SERPS is in respect of retirement pensions only and is in 1994–95 prices.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of home owners whose attendance allowance was withdrawn because they were in residential care temporarily paid for by the local authority pending the sale of their homes, in each year of the allowance's operation. [19325]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available.

Computers

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all cases since 1987 in which his Department has bought computer capacity from *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* the private sector, giving the value of each contract and the name of the private sector contractors. [19453]

Mr. Burt: There are no such cases.

From March 1994 the Department had a contingency arrangement with the private sector to protect some of its mainframe computers. The contract was never enacted. From June 1995, after outsourcing of the Department's data centre services, EDS became responsible for the mainframe computers. The Department requires EDS to guarantee a specific level of service but the specifics of contingency arrangements are a matter for EDS.

Compensation Recovery Scheme

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the compensation recovery scheme. [19767]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 17 October 1995, *Official Report,* column *223.*

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has made of the number and percentage of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples (1) under and (2) over 75 years of age entitled to, but not in receipt of, (i) council tax benefit, income support and housing benefit, (ii) income support and housing benefit, (iii) income support and council tax benefit, (iv) housing benefit and council tax benefit, (v) council tax benefit alone, (f) income support alone and (g) housing benefit alone. [19652]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not readily available. Where obtainable, it could be provided only at disproportionate cost and would not produce reliable results.

Lowered Standard of Occupation Allowance

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discretion Ministers have on the payment of allowance for lowered standard of occupation in individual cases. [20037]

Mr. Heald: Article 21 of the Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983 provides that the allowance for lowered standard of occupation may be awarded to ex-service men and women who, because of the effects of their war pensioned disablement, are incapable, and likely to remain permanently incapable, of following their regular occupation and any other occupation which is of an equivalent standard and suitable for them. The Secretary of State will pay the allowance where he is satisfied that those conditions are met.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many additional claimants would qualify for the disability working allowance if the functional test were applied for initial claims for those not receiving a qualifying benefit; and what estimate he has made of the net cost. [20166]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of disability working allowance have earnings below the lower earnings limit. [20168]

Mr. Mitchell: The lower earnings limit for 1995–96 is £58. On the 31 October 1995 there were 7,644 claimants in receipt of disability working allowance, of whom 2,620 were earning less than £58 per week.

Source:

Disability working allowance computer system 100 per cent. scan of all awards.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the current level of unemployment benefit for an adult aged over 25 years in each EU state; and what percentage this figure represents as a proportion of the current national average wage in each country. [20317]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information on the level of unemployment benefits in each European Union country is contained in MISSOC "Social Protection in the Member States of the European Union", published by the European Commission. Information on unemployment benefits as a percentage of average earnings in member states is available in "Social Protection in Europe 1995", also published by the European Commission. Copies of both publications are in the Library.

Severe Weather Conditions

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what additional funding will be made available to help people in receipt of income support who have suffered loss and damage as a result of the recent severe weather. [21290]

Mr. Roger Evans: I recently announced additional funding for four districts in the Glasgow area amounting to £268,308 for 967 applications. At the same time I also made available a further £80,000 from the contingency reserve for any future emergencies.

Since then, two further districts—Sefton and Highlands and Islands—have been awarded additional allocations from this sum of £80,000 due to their increased expenditure during the severe weather.

On 29 February Sefton district reported a total of 76 awards at a cost of £25,315 and Highlands and Islands 396 awards at a cost of £42,000—a total expenditure of £67,315. The majority of awards were for budgeting loans.

I have therefore agreed that a further social fund in-year allocation of £67,315 should be made to the district offices affected.

The latest information we have suggests that there is unlikely to be any further requirement for additional allocations in the current financial year.

Benefit Statistics

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total amount paid in each of the last five years to workers in *(a)* full and *(b)* part-time employment in the form of housing benefit, family income support and other benefits paid by his Department. [20121]

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information in respect of the in-work benefits is set out in the table. It has been provided in respect of all workers, including those who are self-employed, irrespective of the number of hours they work. In addition to the benefits shown, workers may benefit from a range of categorical benefits, such as child benefit.

£million

Benefit cost	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Family credit[1]	494	626	929	1,208	1,480
Disability working allowance[1]	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	7	13
Housing benefit[2]	340	395	525	600	700
Community charge benefit[2]	170	80	95	[3]—	[3]—
Council tax benefit[2]	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	130	140
Total	1,004	1,101	1,549	1,945	2,333

Sources:

[1] 1995 departmental report.

[2] Estimates derived from the 1 per cent. Housing Benefit Management System sample annual enquiry.

[3] Represents periods before benefits were introduced/after they were replaced.

Earnings Disregard

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on public revenues in 1996–97 and 1997–98 of increasing the earnings disregard under income support for all claimants to at least *(a)* £10, *(b)* £15, *(c)* £25 and *(d)* £50 based on the assumption that (1) the disregard applies equally to individuals and the joint earnings of couples and (2) each partner in a couple is allowed the full disregard. [18104]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 29 February 1996]:* The information is set out in the tables.

Table 1: 1996–97

£ million

Change in disregards	*Assumption 1*	*Assumption 2*
At least £10	20	20
At least £15	40	40
At least £25	110	110
At least £50	240	240

Table 2: 1997–98

£ million

Change in disregards	*Assumption 1*	*Assumption 2*
At least 10	10	10
At least 15	30	30
At least 25	100	100
At least 50	230	230

1. Estimates are modelled on the 1991–92–93 Family Expenditure Surveys and the 1994 Annual Statistical Enquiry, uprated to 1996–97 and 1997–98 levels of prices, earnings and benefit rates. Costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million.
2. Estimates are lower in 1997–98 than in 1996–97, as they take into account the change to the couples disregard for income support and jobseeker's allowance that is to be introduced in October 1996.
3. Costs include the increased cost of housing benefit and council tax benefit due to increased entitlement to these benefits.
4. The costs are shown as the same under both assumptions because of the small number of claims where both the claimant and partner work part time.
5. Behavioural changes, which would be considerable with the higher disregards have been ignored.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Executive Agencies (Contracts)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidelines he has issued on the vetting of private companies tendering for contracts with a next steps agency. [20190]

Mr. Willets: The principles to be followed are laid out clearly in "The Government's Guide to market Testing", paragraphs 6.14 and 6.27, and guidance note No. 40, paragraphs 10.2 and 15.2, issued by Her Majesty's Treasury's central unit on procurement. The guidelines for next steps agencies are the same as those for the rest of central Government. "The Government's Guide to Market Testing" is available in the Library of the House. I am arranging for copies of the CUP guidance note No. 40 to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what vetting procedures are employed to verify the credentials of private companies tendering for contracts with next steps agencies. [20193]

Mr. Willetts: Departments and agencies act in accordance with the guidelines laid out in "The Government's Guide to Market Testing", paragraphs 6.14 and 6.27 and the central unit on procurement's guidance note No. 40, paragraphs 10.2 and 15.2.

In compiling a shortlist, Departments and agencies check companies' capacity and competence for performing the work, their experience in similar work and their financial status. Further checks are made when

evaluating bids on companies' organisation and personnel policies, their technical status, their existing commitments and their financial status, including, creditworthiness, and details of any holding/guarantor companies providing financial backing.

"The Government's Guide to Market Testing" is available in the Library of the House. I am arranging for copies of the CUP guidance note No. 40 to be placed in the Library of the House.

"Competing for Quality" Review

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the "Competing for Quality" review will be published. [20450]

Mr. Willetts: It is anticipated that the review will be finished shortly and the results will be published as soon as possible thereafter.

Civil Servants (Stress-related Illness)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the number of civil servants who have left the service *(a)* by age, *(b)* by gender and *(c)* by Department on grounds of stress-related illness in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [20333]

Mr. Willetts: Stress is rarely cited as a specific cause of ill health retirement, but conditions which may be precipitated or exacerbated by stress fall into the International Classification of Diseases categories for neurotic disorders. The data available relate to civil servants who have retired on grounds of ill health because of neurotic disorders in the calendar years 1993 and 1994, the data for 1995 are currently being analysed.

There were 3,731 ill health retirements from the civil service in 1993, 2,208 male and 1,523 female. There were 4,169 ill health retirements in 1994, 2,346 male and 1,823 female.

Table 1 shows the total number of ill health retirements classified as being due to neurotic disorders, broken down by age at retirement and gender. It further shows these ill health retirements as a percentage of the total number of ill health retirement certificates issued in the year.

Table 1

	1993		1994	
Age	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
<40	34	54	58	71
40-49	85	55	105	68
50-59	98	93	123	94
60+	15	7	12	2
Total	232	209	298	235
As percentage of all IHR's	10.5	13.7	12.7	12.9

Tables 2a and 2b, respectively, show for 1993 and 1994 the retirement rate from neurotic disorders in the larger Departments and in the civil service as a whole, as a percentage of staff in post.

Table 2a: 1993

Department	*Staff in post*	*Neurotic disorder IHR's*	*Percentage IHR rate*
Ministry of Defence	129,225	56	0.04
DSS Group	84,824	71	0.08
Inland Revenue	66,521	55	0.08
Employment Group	52,408	50	0.1
Home Office Prison Service	38,527	48	0.12
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise	25,137	34	0.14
Others	157,570	127	0.09
All civil service	554,212	441	0.08

Table 2b: 1994

Department	*Staff in post*	*Neurotic disorder IHR's*	*Percentage IHR rate*
Ministry of Defence	121,552	91	0.07
DSS Group	87,122	83	0.1
Inland Revenue	62,374	63	0.1
Employment Group	49,289	27	0.06
Home Office Prison Service	38,003	61	0.16
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise	25,115	50	0.2
Others	149,895	158	0.11
All civil service	533,350	533	0.1

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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